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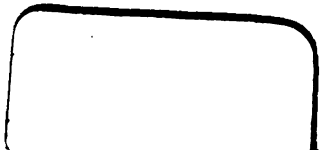
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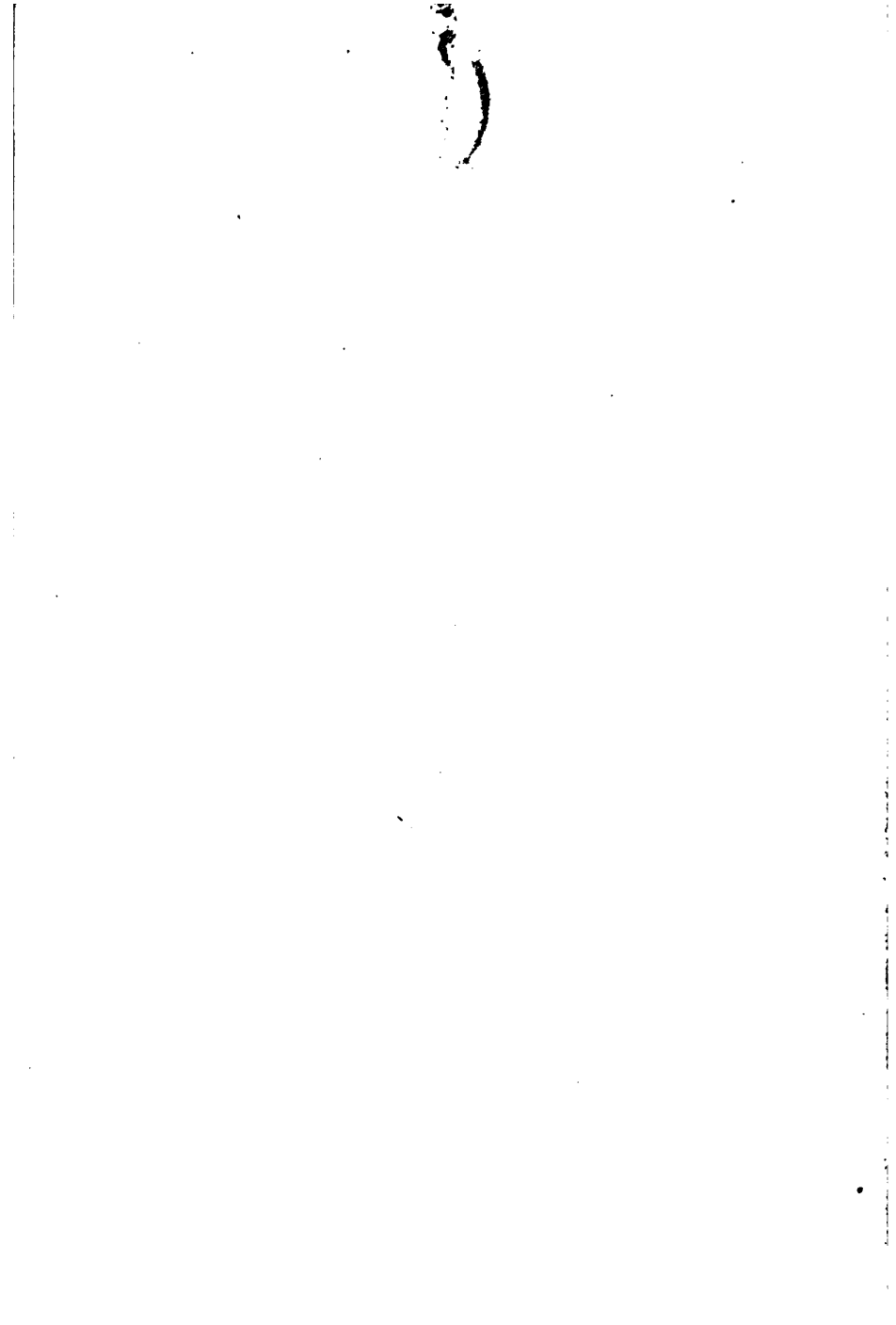
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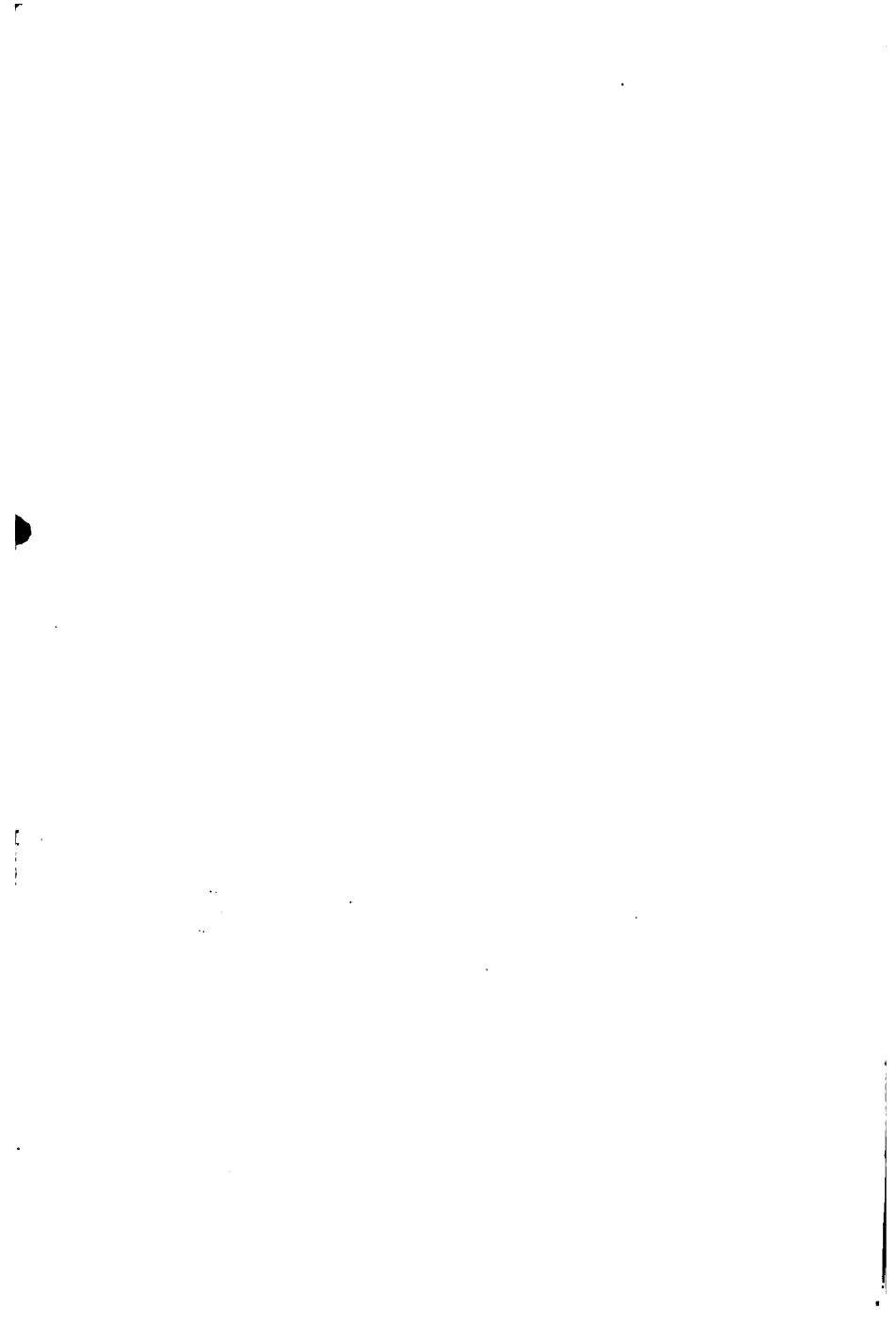
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ANDRIA ✓

BY

PERCY WHITE

AUTHOR OF "MR. BAILEY-MARTIN," "CORRUPTION," ETC., ETC.

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A N D R I A

CHAPTER I

PETER BENT stood before Andria's portrait and mused. 'If I could only paint like that always,' he said to himself, 'the confounded superfine critic could never talk of my bourgeois art. There's feeling for you! there's delicate brush-work! there's tone! there's well—there's inspiration.'

In truth it was a charming portrait of a beautiful bright-haired girl, and Bent had excuses for his elation.

The vivid passions and emotions stirring within him all sprang from the portrait. For years he had turned out the machine-made pictures which, by process of popular selection, and the medium of copyright, drift into the oleographic reproduction of the lodging-house drawing-room. But there was nothing machine-made in Andria's portrait.

'I didn't think it was in you, candidly I didn't,' said Straight the R.A. when he saw it.

Bent had smiled. Secretly he considered Straight a patronising old impostor, but he always concealed convictions of this kind. There was not an ounce of open envy in his character. His tolerant good nature (on the surface) had made him popular in the world

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of artists and he was moving steadily towards his haven in the Royal Academy. 'Peter Bent, R.A.,' shone clear and luminous on the foreground of the future.

Whilst the studios of far more brilliant artists were piled high with their unsold works Peter Bent's found a constant market. No name gave greater lustre to the big Christmas publications. He exploited the oily sentimental bias, which the big public mistake for a love of art, and to which the illustrated Christmas numbers, with unerring skill and knowledge, successfully pander. The copyright of some of his worst pictures brought him in annually sums which the proprietor of a world-wide quack medicine would not have despised.

When the country visitors see his work at the Academy, hung always prominently on the line, they exclaim, 'that's a Peter Bent!' in the same tone of awe as they might say, 'that's a Rembrandt or a Vandyke.'

In vain the superfine sniff and sneer. Peter paints the smug stolid domestic picture the British public loves.

'If ninety per cent. of the population worship the commonplace, why should not I profit by it if I can?'

This is Bent's excuse to himself when *The Wasp* abuses him.

For to the artistic temperament Bent added atavistic business instincts. Peter Bent, senior, now six years dead, the inventor of the famous 'Milo Corset,' the 'mainstay of the corpulently smart,' had set his son an example from which he had not failed to

profit. The father discovered what the public wanted in corsets, the son found what it chiefly desired in pictures.

But once Peter Bent had his dreams like the rest of the world. Big ambitions dogged his steps at the outset and sent him to literature for inspirations.

His 'Childe Ronald to the Dark Tower came,' painted before he left the Academy Schools, and which nearly won (and some thought deserved) the Traveling Studentship, 'showed,' said a thoughtful and competent critic, 'imaginative force of a high and original order.'

But although hung well at the Academy neither the public nor the press took the trouble even to sniff at it. 'Childe Ronald' came back to the painter's then modest studio, 'off' the Fulham Road. His father eyed it contemptuously and said, 'Peter! what the public want is the "Milo Corset!" You take the hint, my lad.'

And so Peter did, but under a slight skirmish of protest.

'The public never heard of "Childe Ronald" nor the "Dark Tower,"' said Peter.

'Sure I never did!' cried his father.

'Indeed,' retorted the son, 'yet Browning's poem is supposed to be popular.'

'Me and your mother is the public,' replied Bent senior. 'Remember that we like something we can understand. What d' you call him a "child" for, when he's a big young man with a long sword, playing a tune on a trumpet.'

Then the young painter perceived the aptness of

this criticism as well as his own commercial mistake. Was not 'the public' of his own household?

'If,' said his father, 'you mean to make a living out o' your business, don't do that sort o' thing!'

Peter Bent endeavoured to defend 'Childe Ronald,' and said glib things, as became a promising Academy student fresh from the president's lectures, on 'Art for Art's Sake' and 'Art and its Higher Aims.' But his father rudely interrupted his eloquence and said, 'That's only "patter," and "patter" don't pay 'xcept in advertisement. Don't you run away with the idea that what a chap reads in books, or what his teachers tell him, helps him to understand what the public want.'

And, although for a show, young Bent stood to his guns, talked of 'the nobler aims of art,' and slightly exasperated his father as a practical corsetier in consequence, he felt all the time that the old man was right.

'Ought an artist to try to please himself or the public?' young Bent inquired, with that proud inflection of voice that answers its own question.

'The public, to be sure, if he's a man of business,' replied the old gentleman scornfully. 'Where should I be, where would your mother be, where would you be, I should like to know, if I'd made stays to please myself?'

This conversation had never been forgotten by Peter Bent. From that day forward, and so long as Providence spared him his parents as valuable Philistine guides to the public taste, he never chose a subject for a picture without consulting them. His mother was an invaluable counsellor in aiding him to exploit

the 'domestic sentimental' side, for she was born with what she described as 'a feeling heart,' whilst his father enabled him to keep this form of art within the strictly conventional lines necessary for its success. Thus, with unfaltering, vulgar brush, Peter Bent learned to please the public whilst he almost lost the ambition to please himself.

But as Peter Bent grew older, and the sober tints of middle life commenced to enfold him, and his parents and the Milo Corset were forgotten, he reached a point in his development in which some of his higher and earlier aspirations were rekindled. To make money and please the dull at times scarcely satisfied his ambitions.

For the force of circumstance, or, in other words, the sacred hunger for gold, brought him into close association with some beautiful young souls. He met them in his own lucrative and fashionable 'School of Art.' For Bent opened his studio twice a week to pupils at terms which excluded all save wealthy amateurs.

His favourite pupil, but scarcely his most promising, was Andria Vincent. Andria's drawing was not strong, nor was her industry so great as her ambition, yet Bent thought her perfect. He had made dozens of studies of her lovely face before painting the superb portrait that stood on his easel.

'Andria!' There was, he thought, a restful murmur in the name that epitomised what she was as well as what she looked.

'She is,' said he, gazing at her portrait, 'one of those impalpable forces which mould the will of men. Does she not make an atmosphere for herself, for me,

and for most other men and women of delicate fibre whom she sails past with the full sweep of her gracious wings?'

Thus mentally Bent apostrophised the picture.

'You must be in love with her!' cried the vulgar monitor of his actions, who sat in the recesses of his being, and dragged Peter's feet to the ground whenever his aspirations desired a romantic flight. 'Are you not a little old for that kind of thing?'

'Peace, fool!' retorted Peter's other self; for in his newly discovered moods the two often exchanged insults; 'this isn't love, it is——'

The definition baffled him. Yet when Peter grasped for the unborn word which was not 'love,' although of love's wide family, his monitor answered with the cynic's grin:

'You are quite too old to marry Andria.'

'Do you suppose I imagine she would think of marrying me?' retorted Bent.

'I'm sure she would not,' replied the voice. 'Are you the man to inspire a romantic passion? You are short, you are rather stout, some might call you plain. Still you possess (together with the business instincts inherited from your father) what your mother used to call "a feeling heart." Perhaps Andria might be satisfied with that.'

But here Peter Bent lit a pipe and determined to discuss the matter no further with his tormentor, fearing that, if he talked of love with Andria, she might never come to his art class again.

Already he was aware that the other pupils exchanged significant smiles whenever he spent more than twenty minutes correcting her defective drawing,

or insisted on placing her easel within the most convenient distance of the model to the detriment of the other students with prior claims of place. But he was willing to purchase the pleasure of Andria's society at a far higher price than that of a little easy ridicule.

CHAPTER II

PETER BENT, the painter, had every excuse for being in love with Andria, as well as for loving her with diffidence. There was at least one rich rival in the field; but Miss Vincent had just come under the restless intellectual spell which frequently takes possession of young women of active mind and unsatisfied aspirations, and sets up for them intellectual and moral ideals such as no ordinary mortal with a taste for self-indulgence and the usual trifling social equipment can hope to satisfy. Unfortunately, too, as Bent half guessed, Andria had assimilated a number of tiresome views on the equality of men and women in questions of conduct which have upset the comfortable and old-fashioned notions of the relations of the sexes planned for the convenience of the male, and converted women into arbitrary critics of man's proneness to transgress. Whilst these opinions might be a protection against the ordinary, intelligent commonplace lover, like Reggie Carter, who had £9000, and followed Andria about like a good-looking, reticent, adoring 'friend of the family,' they were scarcely an encouragement to himself. Still the painter was not without hope. Did not Andria sit at his feet to learn how to mix her colours? At all events, he persuaded himself that he had more in common with her, though she was a brilliant 'sportswoman,' than

the young gentlemen, her brother's friends, who quarrelled for her programme whenever she went to a dance.

But Bent was a cautious and business-like lover. He meant to marry Andria if he could, but decided life would not be insupportable if he could not. This he regarded as the philosophic spirit.

'People ought to be happy and wholesome,' said Andria, at the University Match at Lords'. Her brother, Arthur Vincent, was a 'Blue.' Peter Bent had just learned that a 'Blue' is a subtle admixture of the athletic undergraduate and the demigod.

'Few of us,' he thought, 'appreciate the glories conquerable in fields of enterprise beyond the regions of our own ambitions.' But he kept the sententious reflection to himself, for fear of boring Andria.

'But what's the value of a "Blue" to your brother, Miss Vincent, after he leaves college?' he asked, the unconscious spirit of commercialism prompting the question. 'I cannot quite understand why the athletic undergraduate should long for the distinction with an ardor that men of my profession scarcely feel for the R.A.-ship.'

'I'm sorry for Arthur's sake,' said Andria laughing, 'that there isn't a pension attached to it. Still they do think highly of it at the universities.'

It was at this point she told Bent that she 'liked people to be happy and wholesome.' For Andria at that time worshipped her brother, and resented every suggestion that threatened to depreciate his prowess. Bent was too wise to argue that there existed no logical association between health and happiness and an

admiration for 'Blues.' For his sole excuse for sitting on the drag at her side was his complete ignorance of university cricket, on which Andria proposed to enlighten him.

'You must come and see the match,' she had said, 'and let me tell you all about it.'

'I should like it above all things,' said Bent enthusiastically. 'I have always longed to see a great match at Lords'.'

'Did not you ever play cricket?' she asked.

'I never played any games.'

'What a pity!'

'I mean, seriously,' he replied hastily, 'like they play them now. My ignorance is only relative, you know.'

This conversation had taken place a few days previously at one of Bent's 'At homes.' He always gave eight in the season, and took care they should be fully reported in the papers. Celebrities were quite common in his spacious studio.

He found it very pleasant to sit in the warm sunshine on the drag, although Mr. Carter was on the other side. His place was slightly below Andria's, and he could watch her face changing in the excitement of the game.

A soft breeze fluttered across Lords', rustling the leaves of the trees behind them. The great circle of spectators was bright with splashes of colour and flickering sunshades.

'You are quite right, Miss Vincent,' said Bent meekly. 'To succeed in being happy and wholesome is to solve the most difficult problem of life.'

Fortunately for him Andria was too absorbed to

seek his meaning. For a wicket had fallen, and Arthur was next in.

Mrs. Vincent, a handsome, portly lady, whose figure reminded Bent of a once popular advertisement of the now long-forgotten 'Milo Corset,' faced the ordeal calmly.

'It's Arthur's turn now, Andria,' she said.

'Yes,' said her daughter nervously, whilst Bent watched anxiety spreading over her face and tightening the curving lines of her lovely mouth. Under her blue-and-white muslin dress he fancied he could almost hear her warm heart beating with excitement.

'I wonder if he is as nervous as you are?' he asked.

'Worse—a hundred times. Here he comes.'

'What a splendid young man!' said Bent. 'I should like to paint him.'

'I wish you would. But there!—he's going to bat.'

If her brother had been about to confront a cannon-ball Andria's face could scarcely have been more solemn.

'He's as nervous as he can be,' she said. 'I can see by the way he is standing. I feel he is going to get out. He always does when mother and I come to see him. He says we make the ball bump on a "plumb" wicket.'

Bent did not ask what a 'plumb wicket' might be. He was catching some of her anxiety, and when Arthur drove the next ball to the boundary with a grand sweep of his splendidly balanced frame the artist's voice helped to swell the volume of applause.

'A splendid stroke!' cried Andria, the colour rushing triumphantly to her face.

'Magnificent!' exclaimed Bent, hot with the intensity of his sympathy.

'He 's getting "set,"' said Andria. 'Mother! we haven't brought him bad luck this time.'

'I hope not, dear!'

'Arthur will be all right if he isn't in a hurry to score,' said Mr. Carter, a sunburnt young gentleman with a large bunch of cornflowers in his new frock coat, who was at Arthur's college, and a year his senior.

'I think he is "set," now,' said Peter Bent to show his acquaintance with the terminology of the game.

But the capricious providence that presides over cricket decided that it was not to be the brilliant Arthur's day.

After three 'beautiful' (the adjective was supplied by Andria) 'boundary hits,' and three singles, a fieldsman whom Carter described as 'the cleverest slip at either 'Varsity' dexterously caught him and the spectators roared applause.

'What a misfortune!' exclaimed Bent, as he saw Andria's face cloud over with acute disappointment as her brother walked from the wicket in resigned acquiescence with the decrees of fate.

'I bet Arthur 's pretty sick,' said his friend to Andria. 'I hoped he was in for a "century."'

'I wish he had been,' she answered dolefully.

'He is sure to do better next inning,' said Bent with the air and conviction of a connoisseur.

'It 's better than being "clean bowled,"' said Andria.

'Or even than "playing on" like he did last year.'

'Much better,' said the sympathetic Bent. 'He got out very nicely with that clever "slip."'

Then the university man frowned at him.

'Seen many 'Varsity matches, Mr. Bent?' he asked.

'No. This is the first one.'

'Oh!'

Mr. Carter's contemptuous 'Oh' brought Andria to the rescue.

'Can't you see what an intelligent interest Mr. Bent takes in the game?' she said.

'Are you a "Blue," Mr. Carter?' asked the painter, hoping he was.

'No,' said the young man.

'Mr. Carter just missed his cricket "Blue,"' explained Andria. 'They put in Burt the fast bowler in his place at the last moment. Arthur says it's a mistake and that Burt is no good on these fast wickets.'

'Can't say I think him very dangerous on a sticky one,' said Carter. 'All I hope is that the 'Varsity won't suffer from the choice, and that Burt will come off. But I shouldn't be surprised myself if he lost us the match.'

'Dear! dear! dear!' said Bent sympathetically.

But the great Arthur, like a god from high Olympus, deigned to come amongst his friends on the coach, whilst all the other spectators in the enclosure envied them their prize, and sat like an ordinary mortal with a cloud on his brow to be petted and admired.

'O, Arthur, what bad luck!' cried Andria.

'My luck's always bad,' said Arthur. 'Any other man would have been let off.'

'What's the bowling like?' asked Mr. Carter.

'Piffle!' said Arthur contemptuously.

'Let me introduce you to Mr. Bent, Arthur,' said his sister.

Then Arthur extended a powerful brown hand and said, 'How d' you do, Mr. Bent?'

'Mr. Bent has never seen a 'Varsity match before, Vincent,' said Mr. Carter.

'It is quite true,' said Bent meekly, in answer to Arthur's look of wonder. 'Your sister has been acting as cricket interpreter for me. She tells me you have a very strong eleven.'

'The strongest since Todd's year,' said Arthur with the conviction of perfect knowledge.

Then he turned his handsome sun-tanned face on the painter, and guessing from the expression he found there that the cricket enthusiasm of his new acquaintance was a fictitious emotion, said:

'Andria took me to the Academy yesterday and showed me your picture of the Girl with her Dolls.'

'“Good-night, Dollie”—eh?’ suggested Carter.

'Yes,' said Arthur, 'I don't pretend to know anything about painting, but I thought yours was “ripping.”'

Peter Bent felt he liked Arthur.

'Thank you, very much,' said Bent, laughing good-humouredly. 'My relation to cricket is like yours to painting. I don't pretend to know anything about it, but I enjoyed seeing you play immensely.'

Then Arthur laughed too.

'I only wish,' he said, 'I had given you a better opportunity.'

But another man's stumps had been reached by the ball and Arthur looked grave.

'Four wickets for 75. What a poor show for a team like ours! Luckily we've no tail to speak of.'

'How about Burt and Jopping?' asked Carter.

'Even they knock up runs sometimes,' said Arthur.

'Yes, they fluke a bit when runs are not wanted. To-day they 'll both be in a blue funk. Jopping's defence is all gaps and Burt has no defence at all.'

'Every one is in a funk at the 'Varsity match,' said Arthur. 'I couldn't see the first over Taylor bowled me, thanks partly to the moving background of top hats in the pavilion.'

But the new man began to make runs steadily. The score went steadily up and Arthur and Andria began to look happier. But Carter, with his eyes fixed on Andria, felt he 'didn't care a hang if they lost the match.'

'Andria has made a painting of me, Mr. Bent,' said Arthur. 'Did she show it to you?'

'No; I should like to see it.'

'The drawing would horrify you,' said Andria.

'It is the image of Arthur,' said Mrs. Vincent proudly.

'I shall take it back to college and hang it up in my rooms.'

'That is the best place for it,' said Andria. 'There will be no critics there like Mr. Bent to crush you.'

The painter smiled, remembering how his other pupils suspected him of finding 'a certain feeling' in her work which no one else ever saw.

'I'm not so sure of that,' said Arthur. 'Some men talk a lot of art at the 'Varsity.'

'Wifflyn, Upshott, Winter, Byrling and all that crew,' said Mr. Carter. 'They all talk rot.'

'They fling stones at Ruskin and even the Royal Academy,' said Arthur slyly.

'The profane rebels,' said Bent, laughing.

'Some of the younger dons encourage 'em, you know,' explained Arthur. 'They give each other teas, and the ladies of the place, who are keen on culture, turn up too.'

'I don't think it is quite nice of the dons,' said Mrs. Vincent.

'There are æsthetic teas in London even now at the ninth hour,' said Bent, 'at which the Royal Academy is given to the dogs, and impressionism, "Whistlerism," and newer isms of which I never heard are set up in the place of our noble British orthodoxy.'

'Orthodoxy must learn tolerance,' said Andria, but with most of her attention given to the cricket.

'In the name of orthodoxy,' said the painter, 'I claim tolerance.'

'Ah! you are always tolerant, Mr. Bent.'

'Perhaps, in my case, it only means a decay of enthusiasm,' said he.

'A man can't always be keen,' said Arthur, glancing at Bent and wondering if he should ever look quite as old.

'I 'm sure, Arthur dear,' said his mother, 'you will always be "keen," as you call it. Your father was to the last day of his life.'

'It's easy enough when things don't bore you,' said Arthur philosophically, but intent on the batsmen. 'I wish Taylor had given me a few of those "long hops." They'll take him off next over if they've any sense. Anyhow, if they mean to get a wicket before lunch, they must "buck up."'

But the sunny vacant space of the turf, and the shifting white-clad figures with the thick border of

spectators began to half-hypnotise Peter Bent. The faint drowsiness took the angles off the spurious eagerness he had caught from Andria. Lords' might be the fervid focus of concentrated cricket excitement, but he had slipped out of the circle. The thirteen active young gentlemen in the field might mean what Arthur called 'keenness,' but overhead stretched the warm sky, with its haze of London dust, haunted by the remote screech of ghostly locomotives. There was no 'keenness' there, only the indifference of nature to the affairs of men, manifest in the battalions of soft curled clouds moving eastward in majestic procession.

'What a magnificent artificial excitement cricket is!' exclaimed Bent after a minute's cloud-gazing.

'Depends on the sort o' sportsman,' observed Mr. Carter.

'Not nearly so artificial as painting, Mr. Bent,' said Arthur. 'It's as real as the circulation of the blood.'

'As real as life, then,' answered the painter.

'Why! I've known men to secretly weep in the pavilion because they haven't scored in a 'Varsity match,' said Arthur.

'Poor fellows!' said the earnest Andria. 'Still, Arthur, it's absurd to compare an amusement to a splendid art like painting.'

'That depends on the painter,' said Bent.

'And on the sportsman,' insisted Carter.

'Tested by the volume of popular interest,' said Arthur satirically, 'I maintain that cricket is of more importance than painting. As a philosopher, however much I regret it, I cannot be blind to the fact.'

‘Yes. He was a fellow of Brazenknob, and has a thundering reputation. He is a sort of “up-to-date” Schopenhauer. The ‘Varsity’s proud of him and expects great things. But he’s not a little bit of a sportsman. Sport with him means “the cult of the animal in man.” To add to his fascinations he’s a woman-hater. You don’t catch him drinking tea with the wives of the heads of colleges, so he’s their pet prize.’

‘I wish I had known who it was sooner.’

‘You don’t imagine he would talk philosophy with you, surely!’

‘But the Olympians do come down from the hill-tops, sometimes,’ said Andria, as she left her brother at the entrance to the pavilion, and Carter came up with her mother to escort her back to the drag.

CHAPTER III

WHEN the cricket excitement ended, Andria, to Bent's great joy, once more gave an almost undivided mind to her painting and his teaching.

The Vincents' big house near the Cromwell Road was within a short walk of his studio in the same austere neighbourhood. But wherever a few easels are gathered together there also art gossip begins to flourish.

One morning, it was in the last class of the summer term, by means of a photograph Bent proved to Andria that she had made the model's arm about eight inches too long.

The demonstration started her on a train of thought of which he guessed the suggestive cause. Andria began to wonder to what extent a painter might 'honestly employ photography in his work.'

'For,' she said, 'I want a camera to do all my fore-shortening.'

Then Bent, suspecting that rumours of his own debt to photography had invaded his studio, replied smilingly, 'Must all wayfarers in art mistake the idle gossip of the profession for its inner secrets?'

Bent so rarely struck back that Andria was astonished.

Sometimes her careless reflections wounded Bent as

the innocent questions of a child may prick the conscience of a worldly mother.

He fancied he heard a coarse voice whispering in Andria's ear: 'What! do you work at Bent's? You had better go straight to the "London Stereoscopic." They 'll teach you all the tricks at a tenth the price.'

'Still,' she said, 'they do say that photography must revolutionise art. So long as it does not degrade a picture I really can't see anything dishonest in its use.'

'Photography,' replied the artist serenely, 'may be useful when one has learnt how to draw, for testing the accuracy of one's drawing or sparing a model in a tiring pose unnecessary fatigue. But I 'm convinced the abuse of it will bring its own punishment in the end.'

'But will the public detect the abuse?' she asked.

'You can never rely on their blindness, as you will find out, Miss Vincent, if you ever come to exhibit. There is no short cut to serious painting, and I don't believe there can be a dishonest one. Strong drawing must be behind all really good work.'

'The President couldn't utter nobler sentiments!' said Bent's other voice.

But Andria was satisfied.

'You never say ill-natured things, Mr. Bent,' she said, turning to the modelling of the foreshortened arm with the resigned industry of anticipated failure.

But in questions of art, Peter Bent never expressed his private opinion. His policy—and it had made him very popular with his fellow artists—was one of simple admiration. It was quite as much due to his eager-

ness to admire the work of rivals who had climbed before him into the Academic fold, as to his proficiency as a painter, that he was well in the running for the next Associateship.

Straight's meretricious landscapes, with the bare and niggling trees, wide expanses of sand-dunes, or theatrical stretches of heath and rock, filled Bent with enthusiasm—when he was in Straight's studio. Straight thinks himself a genius; Bent knew he was only a dexterous craftsman.

'Any criticism, Bent?' Straight would say, sucking his pipe complacently before ten square feet of moorland with the atmosphere all pumped out.

'One doesn't criticise Wordsworth,' Bent would answer reverently; 'if he had been an artist he would have worked on your lines.'

This is the only sort of criticism that old Straight will put up with. Whereas if Bent had told this eminent Academician his real opinion it would have destroyed their cordial relations and have lost Peter a vote.

Bent appeased his conscience thus. 'If,' he argued, 'I really thought my candid criticism would help Straight, of course he should have it. But when a man who is forgetting how to paint believes he is a genius, only ill-nature and folly will lead a forlorn hope against this unchangeable delusion.'

But now Andria was troubling the squalid serenity of his soul the rampart of his excuses was beginning to crumble away.

'Art is long,' sighed Andria when her turn came round again. 'This arm won't come right.'

'Mr. Billing has promised to visit us to-day,' said

Bent, 'and I shouldn't like him to see that arm quite so ill-drawn.'

'But the head isn't badly put in,' she expostulated.

'No; capitally.'

'Perhaps Mr. Billing had better not see my drawing,' said Andria. 'It is too discreditable to you.'

'My dear Miss Vincent, we must all begin!'

'But I have been beginning for two years!'

'Two years is nothing. Now if you had been working four, you might feel—well—disappointed with the result.'

'But shall I ever be able to paint well enough to exhibit, Mr. Bent?'

'Certainly,' said he airily.

'How soon?'

'In three years, perhaps.'

'Good heavens! I never look forward three months.'

'Some one ought to be told off to do your anticipation,' said Bent, as he put in the arm to spare her further trouble. 'Looking before and after, and pinning for what is not, brings—brings——'

'Wrinkles?' she suggested.

But in walked Billing with the pompous air of patronage usually mistaken for efficiency.

'My dear Bent,' said he, shaking his hand warmly, 'so delighted to have the chance to see your students' work! Heard it always so favourably spoken of, too!'

'It is indeed good of you to visit us,' returned Bent, 'when we all know how your own work must absorb you.'

Mr. Billing, R.A., does not believe in overproduction, so he shuts himself up with the regularity of a

time-table in his studio, where he reads what he imagines are 'artistic' French novels with the aid of a dictionary, and turns out two pot-boilers a year. Once Billing had a studio in Naples. He has painted Neapolitans ever since. Behind his back he is known as Maccaroni in consequence, but his splendid manner is too potent a shield to bring him face to face with a vulgar nickname.

The pupils looked at the famous Academician in awe. It is a popular delusion that his colour is magnificent. No man ever sprung from the Royal Academy Schools who could talk so glibly about it. No reporter drawn by the exigencies of his profession into art criticism and pastured on Ruskinism and the newest Journalism can touch his resplendent style. He has written on 'Colour: Its Pathos and Passion' in the big reviews, where he has manifested a vague, iridescent, but unapproachable dexterity.

'Mr. Billing,' said Bent to his pupils with an introductory but deferential wave of his hand, 'has come to look at our work.'

'Those of us,' said Billing, 'who follow the stony paths of art must all work, young ladies—and gentlemen,' he added, suddenly detecting the presence of Bent's single male pupil, Cecil Wright, who had some notions of painting, and was believed to be secretly in love with Andria.

Bent led his august visitor to Wright's canvas first.

'Come now, that's highly creditable,' said Billing. 'Drawing excellent, nice feeling, but flesh tints a little cold.'

'I feared to make them too hot. I generally do,' said Wright on the defensive.

'Ah! don't be afraid of colour, my dear sir,' said Billing. 'Shun the new schools with their lifeless greys and sepulchral shadows. The grave of the young artist lies there.'

Then the Academician took the student's brush and palette, and, giving his canvas a few inspired dabs, exclaimed:

'There! I think you will admit that is the glow of life.'

Bent was amused a few days later to find that Wright had carefully eliminated Billing's 'glow.' Andria, as usual, was his informant. No sooner had the visitor departed and the pupils were standing at ease again, than Wright told her that he 'did not intend to paint colour which didn't exist because Mr. Billing fancied it was there.'

'I told him,' continued Andria, 'that Mr. Billing would not have put it in unless he had seen it. Then Mr. Wright, who is rather funny, said that if Mr. Billing sees all the colour he paints he must have a spectroscope for an optic nerve.'

'Very amusing, no doubt,' said Bent judiciously, pretending not to see the joke.

But the visit offered Bent other distractions than these. When Billing came round to Andria he was recklessly complimentary. Her drawing was strong, her colour delicate and refined, and—all the rest of it. Whilst the big painter praised with lavishness, all the little ones, who knew the powers of Andria's painting, as well as those of her beauty, smiled behind their canvases, and Bent beheld the ripple of amusement as it spread round the studio.

'Why on earth,' he wondered, 'has no artist the

honesty to tell her the truth? But we are all the same, from Billing at the top of the tree to Wright at the bottom. Is it because we take her too seriously as a beautiful woman that we are unable to think of her sanely as an art-student?'

The great Billing, because he knew it was expected of him, and also because he enjoyed it, treated the studio to an inspiriting exhortation 'to pursue art for art's sake, and not for any material rewards it might bring.'

The young ladies who had no hopes of ever selling a picture were pleased, and Bent was diverted. He remembered employing the same line of argument with his father in defence of his 'Childe Ronald.' What strange antiseptic keeps these ancient *clichés* fresh for every successive generation of students?

'Billing,' Bent reflected, 'is quite good-natured, and likes me, but he could not study his own market more carefully if he had the "Milo Corset" for sale.'

CHAPTER IV

REGINALD CARTER was two years older than Andria Vincent. His moustache, with its agreeable tinge of gold, was at least heavy enough for a lieutenant of militia, but in spite of years, manhood, and a respectable understanding, he always felt that she regarded him as a big boy.

Once his friend Arthur had said: 'When you come Andria always "hopes there is a cake in the house."' '

This poor jest had an accidental sting in it. It made him believe Miss Vincent adapted her conversation to suit his boyish intelligence and tastes. Accustomed to hear her talk eagerly of books, pictures, and 'quite serious topics,' he imagined that she shifted the conversation to a juvenile level in deference to him.

The fact was that Carter thought more clearly than he talked. As a conversationalist he knew he did not shine like some of the men, he quite fairly ranked in the great army of 'duffers.'

Andria fascinated him. To watch her beautiful, eager, animated face was his constant delight; or, rather, it would have been had not jealousy too often neutralised the pleasure and tainted the charm.

But Carter, as he told himself, 'hadn't been looking on for the last year for nothing.'

'Reggie,' said the friends and relatives of the pros-

perous orphan, 'might marry any one,' and within certain obvious limitations he knew this was true. His ambition did not, however, drive him to find a mate amongst the too numerous daughters of an impoverished peerage where, with propriety, he might have looked, for the vision of Andria which he carried between his eyes blocked the way.

He could never decide in which dress he loved her most, but the memory of a certain delicate white ball gown, the impression of the lovely neck and arms it left bare, and the scent of some roses he had given her chiefly haunted him. He had longed to embrace her, and cover her with kisses, but no more dared to make the attempt than to seek tranquility by blowing out his own honest brains. In fact the crimes seemed in his eyes of almost parallel atrocity. However much the fervid fancy of youth might associate Andria with unrestrained kisses, his experience of her character had taught him the limitless folly of the yearning. He thought 'she left that sort of thing to the housemaids.'

In fact his love was compassed and confined even in his own mind by the conviction that her beauty and graciousness were too transcendent for what, if he had read Wordsworth, he might have described as 'human nature's daily food.' Thus, for a practical young man who desired his life to be as completely happy as he could make it, he was not unconscious of disappointment.

But wherever Andria was, any intelligent search party would have looked for Mr. Carter. No 'friend of the family' was ever more assiduous than he.

One day his sister, a wealthy widow lady several

years older than himself, seeing the nature of the case, insisted on taking counsel with him. She pointed out that, in a precarious world, £9000 a year represented a safe and comfortable matrimonial anchorage which no intelligent and self-respecting young woman was likely to reject. Finally, although unconscious of having received any encouragement from Andria Vincent, Carter decided to ask her to marry him.

‘If you’re not quick,’ said his sister, ‘that little painter man will “cut you out.”’

And although Carter thought it impossible that Andria could think seriously of becoming Mrs. Peter Bent when she might be Mrs. Reginald Carter of Heronwake Hall in the county of Wiltshire, he could not be sure to what lengths enthusiasm for art might lead an ardent student.

Before he made the final attack on what he feared might prove an impregnable fortress, Mr. Carter skirmished clumsily on the fringe of the ramparts. Unluckily he was unskilled in the delicate manoeuvres of courtship, and Andria routed him without even perceiving his serious intentions.

It was at a dance, and he had induced her to sit out a polka in the conservatory.

There was no one there but themselves. The ‘rum tum tum’ of the jigging band sounded far away. For a dashing lover here was a brilliant opportunity. There were ferns, heavily scented flowers, a dim, soft light, and for some minutes at least, fragrant solitude. But looking into his mind the lover found no shaft of wit or pathos to interest her, for love made him diffident and awkward; so the rôles were reversed, and

Andria amiably tried to amuse the young man with recollections of the university match.

'You take great interest in cricket,' he said resentfully, after he had given his opinion on the alleged weakness of university bowling.

'Yes, I caught it from Arthur. But don't you too, Mr. Carter?'

'Yes, of course, but——'

Then he hesitated. The gulf between the national sport and his love for her seemed insuperable to his vocabulary. Passion had changed all his boyish perspectives.

'But what?' she asked, noting his hesitation.

She was sitting easily in a low arm-chair under the leaves of a large fern; he was perched awkwardly on the edge of a narrow ledge supporting the flower-pots.

'Well, there are a good many more important things than cricket in the world.'

'I always understood that you were chiefly so interested in sport,' she said carelessly.

'So I am.'

'You are not very comfortable, I'm afraid,' she said, perceiving the uneasiness of his position, which, perhaps because it coincided with that of his mind, he made no effort to change.

'I'm comfortable enough—in some ways,' he said.

'Why not in others?'

'I don't exactly know. Perhaps because there are certain things a man wants and can't get. What ought a man to do in these cases, Miss Vincent?'

'You are too vague. I scarcely know,' she said laughing. 'Watch and pray, perhaps.'

'I do watch,' he said, 'and in a sort of way, I pray too. What else can I do?'

She looked up at him. His face was rather flushed, and he was twisting his soft, youthful moustache nervously. He seemed very healthy, well-fed, and comely, and his appearance suggested her reply.

'Try fasting.'

'I always am fasting,' he said, 'that's the trouble.'

'You are more ambitious than I thought, Mr. Carter.'

'I know I am—a hundred thousand times.'

'Yours is a most interesting case, Mr. Carter. Let me, without irreverence, recapitulate. You are suffering from a form of ambition at present nameless, which refuses to yield to watching, fasting, or prayer. Thus you become the hero of a most interesting psychological play.'

'Write it for me, please, Miss Vincent.'

'No, I'm not clever enough. Ibsen must come to the rescue, and call it "Hamlet the Second."'

Then, whilst he was endeavouring to remember something about Ophelia, whose name he had forgotten, in order to convey the message he feared to deliver, the polka stopped and Andria's partner came and carried her off.

'Evidently,' he reflected ruefully, 'she can't or won't see what I'm driving at. She treats it all as a joke.'

Then he returned to the ball-room and stood by the door to watch her dancing—a sight which made him miserable and jealous. Her beautiful white neck and arms troubled his longing senses and prevented him from finding solace or amusement with his other partners.

When he went home that night he decided that it was 'no good beating about the bush,' and prepared to lead his love on a forlorn hope.

He chose an afternoon when he knew Mrs. Vincent and Arthur were both absent from home. It was a cloudy summer's day and London had been drenched with the warm rain. He drove up to the Vincents' in a hansom. He would have preferred to walk, but he fancied his chances of success might be better if his boots were spotless.

Andria was reading Otway's *Science and Civilisation*, in which she was deeply interested. It ill-prepared her for Carter's coming declaration. According to this philosopher, love was a discreditable passion against which men must carefully guard. 'Whether,' he wrote, 'it manifests itself in the form of transcendental hysteria or in the tyranny of an ignoble instinct, it is equally the duty of the victim to conquer a passion which, in spite of the presentations of the erotic poets, is well within the coercive area of the will so long as the sufferer remains sane.'

Andria was under this shower-bath when the servant announced Mr. Carter, and felt faintly aggrieved at the interruption.

Her visitor sat down opposite her and wondered how he should begin. She looked, he thought, dangerously cool, self-contained, and reasonable. In fact she was in the aggressively rational mood which Otway's book invariably produced on pliant and intelligent subjects.

Mr. Carter felt that he could not rush at once into a passionate declaration, so he remembered that he had called at Peter Bent's studio the day before and

seen the portrait for which she had just given the final sitting. The picture enabled him to break the ice, and he spoke enthusiastically on its merits.

‘Mr. Bent has done nothing like it,’ he said.

‘Every one thinks it is good,’ she answered. ‘I wish Mr. Bent would paint Arthur.’

‘He will if you ask him,’ said Carter. ‘He would do anything for you. Everybody would.’

She was astonished at his warmth. And her face showed it. Something which he had brought there seemed stirring in the quiet room.

‘But,’ he resumed, ‘nobody in the world would do more for you than I. Miss Vincent, don’t think me a fool for what I ’m saying.’

‘Don’t say it,’ she interrupted, guessing it from his face.

‘I must. I love you with all my heart. I want you to be my wife and try to care for me too.’

He rose from his seat, his face pale with excitement, conscious of lack of tact and eloquence. His heart was so full, his words seemed so empty.

Andria only looked annoyed and worried.

‘It is impossible, Mr. Carter,’ she said. ‘You must feel it is.’

‘No, I don’t. Ask any one? You think I ’m a fool because I ’m not a glib talker like some other men. But I ’m convinced I could make you happy because I love you so !’

‘Please don’t say any more. It ’s impossible.’

‘Why?’

‘Because it is.’

Then seeing his miserable face she added, ‘Because I could not love you.’

Then he saw the immense distance between them. She was a little vexed, whilst he felt his sky turning black.

'I wish you had never told me this,' she added. 'You have spoilt everything.'

But still he walked up and down the room in deep distress, finding no words either of complaint or reproach, but only a dull opposition to his defeated hopes.

'I won't worry you any more,' he said at last. 'I'll only ask you one question. Do you like any one else?'

'No. But you must take this for my final answer. We can't discuss it again. It only makes us both uncomfortable and a little ridiculous.'

'All right,' he said, miserably conscious as she was of the lack of dignity in the situation. 'I won't say any more, but I shall never care for any one else as long as I live. You may think that's humbug, but it's true.'

The idea of a commonplace young gentleman 'loving for a lifetime' appeared to her, fresh from her studies of Otway's book, as an absurd exaggeration.

'People fancy that sometimes,' she said, unconsciously quoting Otway; 'it is a form of "transcendental hysteria."'

'I don't care what it is, but it is true. Perhaps you will know some day. Good-bye!'

'Good-bye,' she said. 'No one need ever know of this.'

Then feeling ill-used, defeated, humiliated he left the room. She saw his face quivering with suppressed

emotion and was touched, and, although pride denied it, flattered too.

Walking along the muddy streets, now regardless of the consequence to his resplendent boots, the words 'transcendental hysteria' buzzed in his brain like an angry bee.

'She's been reading it in some beastly book,' he thought. 'This d——d cant about culture spoils all the best women.'

But what was he to do? Why not go out to South Africa? Several men he knew were starting shortly and he might join them. He might find a remedy there for his 'transcendental hysteria,' the phrase sticking in his mind like the arrow in Virgil's stricken deer.

He was only a few steps from Bent's studio, and he decided to go there for a purpose.

Bent was painting the white satin of a dress in the portrait of a lady of opulent charms, whose air of pompous self-complacency was cleverly caught on the canvas. Even the lay figure now wearing the brocaded gown reflected it.

'Pleased to see you, Mr. Carter,' said the painter, wondering why he had come.

'I hope I'm not interrupting you,' said Carter, whose face suggested a sudden reversal of fortune. 'That's a portrait, I suppose.'

'Yes. Do you like it?'

'Awfully. She's a fine woman. Almost as fine as the lay figure. I mean in build.'

'She is a Mrs. Drew—Drew & Brewster, the great auctioneers,' Bent explained.

Carter took two hasty strides across the studio and

stopped before Andria's portrait, which had brought him to the studio.

'Now that's a splendid picture,' he said. 'Your plump lady there with the fat arms is not in the same running, either as a picture or a woman.'

'I agree with you,' replied Bent, 'although I must say the arms are quite "Rubeny" in workmanship. But then Mrs. Drew isn't so inspiring a subject as Miss Vincent.'

'Aren't you putting it a little mildly?' asked Carter, gloating over Andria's picture.

'I'm not exaggerating.'

'I should think not. Well, Mr. Bent, I want to talk to you of Miss Vincent's portrait. I don't know the etiquette of these affairs, and I hope you won't think me a bounder if I ask you to sell me that picture. You can fix your own price, of course.'

The man of business and the diffident lover met in brief conflict in the painter's breast, and the latter won.

'I'm sorry,' he said, 'I can't let you have it even if Miss Vincent had no objection.'

The artist touched up the satin draperies, his visitor stood still before Andria's portrait. He had never expected Bent would be willing to sell it.

'But since,' continued Bent, after a pause, 'you admire the portrait I can give you an excellent photograph of it.'

The painter opened a drawer and took out three.

'You can,' he said, 'take your choice.'

'It's awfully kind of you,' said Carter, 'especially after my unprovoked bid.'

Bent wrapped the photograph in tissue paper and handed it to Carter.

'But I've another proposal to make,' continued Carter. 'You told Miss Vincent at Lords' that you would like to paint her brother Arthur.'

'And so I should.'

'Will you paint him for me at your usual terms?'

'With pleasure, if he will sit.'

'You must manage that. He's a handsome fellow, and it will flatter him. But you mustn't let him or his sister know it's a commission from me. Tell him you want to paint him because he's a big swell in the athletic world and he'll sit fast enough.'

Bent, having guessed Carter's motive, promised secrecy.

'And now good-bye, Mr. Bent. I'm off,' said Carter.

'Good-bye. But I shall see you at the Vincents' on Sunday?'

'No. I'm going to South Africa for six months.'

'What on earth for?'

'To study mining interests, and make an experiment. That's all. Good-bye.'

Then Carter left the studio, and the observant painter drew his conclusions.

'I'll swear she's refused that boy,' he thought. 'There isn't another girl in London who would have done it.'

He left off painting, lit a pipe, and mused over his own chances. Why on earth should she have refused him, unless, unless—well unless—well—unless she liked some one else?

'She thinks him too young and too dull, I suppose,' he thought. And the vision of Andria despising £9000 a year began to glow alluringly in the painter's mind.

CHAPTER V

PETER BENT had often heard Andria speak enthusiastically of Louis Otway's famous book, *Science and Civilisation*. In fact, in defence, and to escape reproach, he had pretended that he had read it, although his acquaintance did not extend beyond the introduction to its contents offered him by the urbane hand of the *Spectator*. Bent took it for granted that the book was one of extraordinary brilliancy and originality, since he found this was the opinion of critics qualified to judge. Otway's chapter on 'Monogamy as an Institution,' in which the writer endeavoured to prove that the destruction of the marriage bond by the gradual loosening of the tie would wreck human progress, was regarded as a complete refutation of Prendergast's theory on 'The Future Relations of the Sexes,' which had terrified the orthodox before the arrival of their champion.

Otway's book, in spite of its pessimism, was sufficiently in harmony with the advanced views to be popular, consequently the painter, who knew the Vincents' eagerness for 'lions' of all sorts, was not surprised to find the author sitting beside Andria in their drawing-room on the following Sunday afternoon when he called.

Arthur Vincent had lunched with his friend, the Dean of Brazenknob, at the Athenæum and had

found Otway there as his fellow guest. The young Oxford man had mentioned the enthusiasm of his sister for *Science and Civilisation*. Otway remembered her beautiful eager face, and, in spite of his reputation as a misogynist, felt a desire to become acquainted with so fair a disciple, especially as hitherto he had, as he expected, failed to discover that women took any real interest in his book. A few of the 'cultured' ladies at Oxford paddled in it awkwardly for his gratification, but this exercise rather irritated than pleased him. But Miss Vincent was a different type to the female dons who flourished in opulent priggishness at either seat of polite learning.

Thus in the natural course of events the painter met the philosopher.

'Every one knows Mr. Otway through his great book,' said Mrs. Vincent as she introduced them, 'and all of us are acquainted with Mr. Bent through his pictures.'

Accustomed to be labelled with this phrase, the painter was growing tired of it, although not so tired as Andria.

'That fellow ought to have been a priest,' thought Bent, glancing at his new acquaintance. A mingled atmosphere of asceticism and scholarship clung round Otway's refined head, and shone luminously through his pale-blue eyes. 'It's an unworldly obstinate face,' mused the painter, who was a student of physiognomy, 'and ought to belong to an ecclesiastic. Perhaps he has given to philosophy what was intended for another form of bigotry.'

Otway had a wonderful memory.

'I remember the first picture you exhibited at the

Academy, Mr. Bent. It was taken from a poem of Browning.'

'Childe Ronald to the Dark Tower came,' answered Bent, surprised and pleased.

'I never heard of it,' said Andria in astonishment.

'It was before your time, Miss Vincent, and in my earlier style, which the public never encouraged.'

'Mr. Otway doesn't care much for modern British pictures,' said Mrs. Vincent, as though the fastidious aloofness of their new friend were evidence of distinction.

'A part of my mind is still in the sixteenth century,' said Otway, with a pale smile. 'Fortunately painters need not consult my tastes.'

'It might, perhaps, narrow their market,' said Bent, who had long ago buried his tastes for mediæval dabbings.

Then Andria and Otway resumed the conversation which Bent's arrival had interrupted, whilst the painter became Mrs. Vincent's audience. The philosopher was interested to find in a sex which he despised so sincere an appreciation of his work. Most women, he thought, believed what they wished, but here was one with whom dogmatism appeared to have small weight.

A little later Arthur came in, and the conversation turned to the late university match. The cricket microbe which the son had imported from Oxford had inoculated the whole family. Otway, who had a philosophic approval of field sports, picked up from the gossip of the College Common Room, was appreciatively tolerant of an enthusiasm which he regarded as childish, but the painter could only sit outside the

charmed circle and remark occasionally that 'it was a grand game' to prevent Andria suspecting that he was bored.

Arthur happened to be annoyed with the sporting papers for depreciating the university bowling. 'If,' said he, 'we had Mold at one end and Richardson at the other, the reporters would pooh-pooh 'em. The truth is newspapers know nothing about the game.'

'They are equally ignorant of other things,' said Otway.

'Of painting, for example,' said Bent.

'But then painting's a question of opinion and cricket's a matter of fact,' said Arthur.

'It's the practice in democratic countries to measure values by the silly jumble of chaotic inaccuracy called public opinion,' said Otway. 'Cricket and painting suffer with the rest.'

But here Mrs. Vincent, fearing the conversation might become too deep for her, and reveal the fact that she was unable to understand Mr. Otway's book, wondered whether they 'should see Mr. Carter, who generally came in on Sunday afternoon.'

'He has gone to the Cape,' said Bent, pleased to explode a piece of startling information mischievously tickling his brain.

Astonishment flashed on him from the Vincents' faces.

'Gone to the Cape!' cried Arthur. 'What on earth for?'

'Did you know, Andria?' asked her mother with mixed suspicion and disappointment.

'I had no idea of it,' she replied.

'But you saw Mr. Carter on Tuesday.'

Peter Bent watched the colour deepening on Andria's cheeks.

'Yes,' she answered, 'but he said nothing about going to the Cape.'

Mr. Carter's self-imposed exile seemed to her ostentatious and in bad taste, for she perceived her brother and mother and she suspected Mr. Bent too regarded her as in some way the cause of this compromising departure.

'How extraordinary!' exclaimed Mrs. Vincent, 'and without even saying "Good-bye."'

'He called on my studio on Tuesday afternoon,' said Bent, now convinced of the reason of Carter's exile. 'I understood he was going to look after mining interests, or something of that kind.'

Arthur stared reproachfully at Andria and made her uncomfortable.

'Probably your friend went to South Africa for the simplest of reasons—to get rich,' suggested Mr. Otway.

'But he is rich,' said Bent.

'Nine thousand a year, poor old chap,' said Arthur, 'and the best pheasant shooting in Wiltshire. Poor old Carter.'

And he flung his pity at Andria like stones, and made her feel very guilty. She could not even be sure that the foolish young man had not confided in the painter. This supposition doubled her embarrassment.

But Otway, uninterested in Mr. Carter or his sudden departure, rose to go.

When the door closed behind him, Mr. Bent dispelled the cloud his information had raised by express-

ing his wish to paint Arthur, who readily agreed to accept an honour so much in harmony with his vanity.

'Imagine Arthur in the Academy,' said Andria, 'hanging amongst the bishops, provincial mayors, masters of hounds, and company directors!'

'Why not?' he replied. 'There's perfect equality in pictures. The "big pots" needn't be ashamed of me.'

'Ashamed indeed,' said Mrs. Vincent proudly, 'I should think not. I wonder, Mr. Bent, if the public will observe the likeness between my two children?'

'Unless I fail absolutely they can hardly help it,' said Bent.

'You should paint Louis Otway,' said Arthur magnanimously. 'His old college is awfully proud of *Science and Civilisation*. The master brags of him as "Brazenknob's most distinguished son." They would hang his picture in Hall on terms of equality with the poets and judges and bishops.'

When the painter left, Arthur and his mother, who had persuaded themselves that Andria was sure to marry Reginald Carter because the match appeared to them as so exceedingly appropriate, united their forces in a fire of cross-questions until, finally driven to bay, she admitted that Mr. Carter had 'made a mistake.'

'Poor old Carter!' said Arthur when he was alone with his mother. 'Just fancy a man like that taking "no" for an answer. But he never did understand women.'

'Andria seems very much attracted by Mr. Otway,' said Mrs. Vincent, who preferred married daughters.

'I hope not. He's a clever writer, and all that sort

of thing, but he isn't the right man for a girl like Andria.'

'Why not? He is most gentlemanly, I'm sure, and not at all like one's idea of a philosopher with long hair and a snuff-box. He is very well off, too.'

'He's all right to look at, but he's a misogynist.'

'A what?' said Mrs. Vincent rather alarmed.

'A woman-hater, you know.'

'Oh, that's all,' she said relieved. 'He will grow out of that. He isn't more than five and thirty. There is plenty of time. I dare say he has been unfortunate in his friends.'

'He will never grow out of it,' said Arthur, significantly, 'at least not if the tales they tell of him at Oxford are true.'

But when Mrs. Vincent desired more definite information, her son became enigmatic, and informed her that Mr. Otway would never think of marrying, because, however much he might admit the necessity of the institution of marriage in the abstract, he had a personal aversion to it as an individual.

'Dear me, how very odd!' said Mrs. Vincent. And she thought the world was becoming very 'viewy' and peculiar, and was quite unable to believe that so refined a person as her new acquaintance could hold such reprehensible social opinions. But there! what girl was there more fitted than her own daughter to demonstrate their folly?

CHAPTER VI

ANDRIA had turned one of the rooms with a southern aspect into a studio. Here she hung up her drawings and contemplated a picture which was to astonish Peter Bent and his pupils. Her art strivings represented the safety-valve for the various enthusiasms of which she was the prey, but the suspicion that her efforts might be futile and wasted had scarcely entered her mind until Otway's book began to trouble her mental serenity. When she finished it she seemed to have acquired a logical foothold in the world whence she could view more clearly the scheme of life, formerly merely a vague and iridescent mystery. But the intellectual profit was balanced by a counteracting loss of enthusiasm. For she found the swift power of idealism that had enabled her to turn a cricket match into a vivid human drama was diminishing in proportion as she advanced the frontiers of her experience. In Otway's philosophy there were no mountain chains of enchantment. His mental landscape, grey with rationalism, stretched away to the horizon in an unbroken and monotonous plain.

One morning Arthur came up to his sister's studio to smoke a pipe. She disliked the smell of it but was glad to have him. Andria belonged to a sketching club. The subject for the month was 'Moses in Egypt,' and the treatment of it greatly perplexed her.

'An idiotic subject!' said her brother. 'Stupid enough for an Oxford examiner.'

The career of the famous law-giver was full of incident. At first she selected 'the Burning Bush' and attacked it in an impressionistic style, but soon fell back baffled. Next she tried 'Moses gazing on the Promised Land,' from a misty mountain top. Since one figure would suffice this offered distinct advantages. But her brother mocked and thought 'Moses looked like a Cockney sportsman deer-stalking in the Highlands.'

'I wish I had left out the mist and made the landscape more arid,' said Andria, gloomily viewing her handiwork. Finally, she selected 'Moses striking the Rock,' and since it was one degree less ridiculous than the other two efforts, and time was up, she recklessly sent it off to the sketching club to take its chance.

'It isn't really so *very* bad,' said Arthur, who had stood for Moses with a poised walking-stick for a quarter of an hour. Then seeing her disappointment at the feeble result of so much toil, he added, 'Don't worry over it. Bent says you paint nearly as well as a lady amateur can expect.'

Then Andria, remembering her master's adulatory comments on efforts scarcely more successful, wondered whether Bent and her other critics, including Mr. Wright and Mr. Billing, really measured her work by the standard they applied to art-students generally. 'Perhaps,' she thought, 'they look on me as a young lady with an innocent fad, and never tell me the truth for fear of hurting my feelings.'

Above all things Andria wished to be taken seriously.

'A lady amateur!' repeated she disdainfully. 'Mr. Bent has never called me that before.'

'Of course not, he is such a good-natured old chap. It suits his book to pretend all his lady pupils are geniuses. Besides, it is his theory that nothing is so encouraging as flattery. I dined with him at his club and we had a bottle and a pint of champagne—champagne excites confidences, you know, Andria.'

'But I don't know.'

'That's because you never drank enough. Ask Bent if it doesn't. He felt called upon to give me good advice. "If you want to be popular, my dear boy, avoid criticising your friend's work. *Omnia admirari* is my motto." Afterwards in the smoking-room, which was full of artistic chaps in loose collars and ties, I was astonished to discover how popular "Peter" as they called him was. "Peter's cocksure of the next Associateship," one man said to me. "Is he?" said I. "Certainly," said he. "The milk of human kindness deserves a place in the R. A. It wants some to keep it sweet." It's old Bent's cue to crack everybody up. I've no doubt if he saw your "Moses in the Mountain" that he'd discover excellent points in it.'

'I suppose you consider painting is for me what cricket is for you, Arthur,' she said.

'Hardly,' he answered smiling, but in earnest all the same. 'You see, I am well up to county form. Apply a parallel measure to painting, and you won't be in the class. In fact, if the English people knew as much about art as they do about cricket they would close the Academy by Act of Parliament, and put a tax on amateurs like you.'

Then, roaring with laughter at his own joke, Arthur went downstairs.

But it did not please Andria, who held a higher opinion of her brother's shrewdness and worldly wisdom than their undeveloped qualities merited. It gave her, however, food for some unpleasant reflections. She seemed to have unearthed a conspiracy organised for the purpose of deluding her, and she hated to be treated like a fool. What if Peter Bent's approval were mere flattery! If her powers of painting were never to surpass those of the crowd of ladies who 'dabble in oils'? Why did he mislead her by his criticisms? Then in quest of comfort she turned to her studies on the wall, but suddenly they had lost something. Her achievements dwindled down to a few flat and profitless productions, and for the first time she despised the skill she had taken so many months to acquire.

A few days later Louis Otway called and asked if he might see her paintings.

'I have nothing to show but feeble schoolgirlish studies,' she said.

'Mr. Bent told me you were one of his most promising pupils,' he replied.

'I have lost all heart for my work, Mr. Otway, but you will hardly understand what that feeling is.'

'Except in a few moments of intellectual excitement, unlikely to be repeated, I never have had any for mine.'

'You say that, Mr. Otway, because after a prolonged mental effort—the four years spent in writing your book—you are tired. But I believe your heart was in every line of *Science and Civilisation*!'

'I wrote every paragraph under a little undercurrent of despair. I felt like a blind man playing a stale melody on a shrill pipe which the crowd had no wish to hear.'

'I think I understand your parable. You feared the big, stupid public might have no ears for philosophy.'

'For my philosophy. I write every line with the anticipation of failure.'

'Failure! when your book is in its third edition?'

'Yes; such is the curse of temperament. Now when I look at the result of what may possibly be my life's work, it seems a very futile and trifling achievement.'

'That is modesty, Mr. Otway.'

'I'm afraid it is nothing so respectable. Perhaps the expenditure of vital energy in my case has consumed all powers of tumultuous enjoyment. And may that not be the reason,' he added laughingly, 'why philosophers are so dull? But let us "hang up philosophy," Miss Vincent, for I really am anxious to see your pictures.'

Otway had never tried to amuse or interest a woman before. He excused himself now by assuming that Miss Vincent was a new type, whom, as an earnest psychologist, he must study in order to ascertain whether his opinion of women needed a modification. His 'investigations' were erratic and unscientific in method. In some inexplicable manner they had led him to talk of his own work, aims, and misgivings with a lack of restraint which, however humiliating theoretically, he found practically very pleasant.

Unawares, in his devious wanderings, Otway had stumbled on a pleasant oasis in the arid desert of his pessimism, and his tired intellect longed to sit down under the waving palms by the clear waters.

‘But I am ashamed of my work,’ said Andria.

‘Then I am all the more anxious to see it,’ he answered.

‘Do you think it well to know the worst?’

‘No good ever comes of shirking the truth.’

‘But there may be comfort in illusions, Mr. Otway.’

‘Never for long. In any case they are degrading.’

Of course Louis Otway never allowed that he stabled one.

‘I will be brave then,’ said Andria. ‘You shall see my pictures and I will abide by your opinion. I have not forgotten your chapter on the evils of polite lies.’

‘I will tell you what I think,’ he said.

‘The truth is a tonic I badly need,’ she said, as she led the way to her painting-room.

The situation had piquancy for an examiner in moral philosophy. The bare room interested him. A bowl of fading roses, lately used for a ‘study in still life,’ stood on the table. Through the open window looking on a mews the hot air waves of the July day entered encumbered with the rattle of wheels from the Cromwell Road. The walls were almost hidden by the sketches, life studies, experiments in charcoal, pastels, and canvases, for Andria rushed from one medium to another in her efforts at self-expression, as a restless bird in a cage changes its perch in its ineffectual pursuit of the unattainable.

‘You must see my life studies first,’ she said.

‘They were done at Mr. Bent’s studio.’

Otway looked at them carefully. The modelling was feeble, the flesh tints brown and lifeless, their promise small. There was evidence of patience and industry, but few signs of talent.

When he caught glimpses of her face as he moved from study to study, he half forgave the partial friends.

'Well,' said Andria, at last, feeling the silence heavy on her, 'what do you think?'

'That is the best,' he answered, pointing to the muscular figure of a young man. 'The foreshortening of the arm is skilful and the drawing of the torso masterly.'

'I felt you would select that study,' she said. 'This is the history of it. Mr. Billing, the Royal Academician, was to visit the studio when that model was sitting for us. I blundered over the arm and torso dreadfully. Mr. Bent came to the rescue. He put in the arm, touched up the drawing, and gave the figure the swing. I made it look like a snow-man. Look at the hands; they are mine. Now that the scales of conceit are falling from my eyes they look like wool work.'

Otway was silent. Whether she painted well or ill was indifferent to him except as an index of her powers of self-illusion. He heard a train rumbling out of South Kensington Station, and a large blue fly buzzing stolidly round the room, but, even if he sought one, found no loop-hole to escape from the opinion he had formed.

Then she began to question him.

'What do you think of my drawing?' she asked.

'It is feeble.'

‘Of my colour?’

‘It leaves much to be desired.’

‘Colour bad, drawing feeble. Our opinions quite coincide. I won’t ask you to praise my industry, since that is merely an active form of vanity. But there is worse to come. You must see my compositions, which even Mr. Bent allows do not “come up to the level of my life work.”’

Otway examined them with a relentless eye. A few showed dramatic instinct, but only one rose above the average of the provincial sketching club. It was labelled ‘Death in the Desert,’ and represented ‘the Bactrian convert’ of Browning’s poem grazing a lean goat at the sandy mouth of the desert cave, and was reminiscent of Holman Hunt.

‘This, at all events,’ said Otway, ‘is clever and original.’

‘Don’t you think any of the others good?’ asked Andria.

‘No one is nearly up to this standard. You have grasped something of the feeling of the poem.’

‘I’m sorry to say it isn’t mine. It was painted by Mr. Wright, who gave it to me in exchange for my own sketch. So like a just judge, you have convicted me as I deserve.’

But she looked so disappointed at the verdict she read rather in his face than his words, that he tried to console her.

‘Failure at your age is experience,’ he said, ‘a part of the unpleasant discipline of life, and not defeat. Why should any one wish to be a fifth-rate artist? To learn how to live is much more important than to learn how to paint. We are forgetting how to stand

at ease in the absurd march of progress. When we have mastered that some of us will hear the music of the spheres. This modern intellectual activity will end in becoming a form of neurosis. The half of the population which doesn't paint poor pictures writes bad books.'

'My brother suggests a tax on amateurs as the best remedy,' answered Andria, struggling against her mortification. 'But come downstairs, forget these tiresome pictures, and I will give you some tea.'

When he was leaving a few minutes later she said, 'Thank you for helping me out of a fool's paradise.'

'You will never,' he answered, 'be at ease in the world until you have acquired a wholesome pagan indifference to all forms of intellectual noise.'

Then he left and carried with him into the sun-scorched Cromwell Road a charming impression of a stately young woman in a soft white dress and the cool hands of perfect health.

CHAPTER VII

ANDRIA wore her crown of humiliation with resignation. That it was necessary to wear it at all was due, she thought, to Peter Bent.

'If I can't paint,' she thought, 'I can't do anything. There isn't another talent left for me to cultivate.' She thought of Otway's advice seriously only because it came from the author of *Science and Civilisation*. But how was a woman to learn to live with a hundred conflicting voices shouting different counsels?

A few days after his interview with Otway her brother announced that his portrait was finished.

'Peter says you must come and see it,' he said to Andria.

'I don't think it is quite nice to call Mr. Bent "Peter," Arthur dear,' said Mrs. Vincent. 'It sounds so flippant.'

'Peter is a term of endearment,' said her son, laughing, 'and not of derision. He likes me to call him Peter.'

'Let us go directly after lunch,' said Andria, the combative instinct quickening her desire to come to close quarters with the man whom she held responsible for eighteen months' self-illusion.

Before the painter's doors were several carriages whose opulence suggested that the artist had carefully

cultivated relations with that portion of society in which the feeling for art seems to be embodied in the conviction that, 'if you want a good picture, you must be prepared to pay a good price for it.' Thus by a simple mental process the 'good price' when once paid means a picture to be proud of.

'Mr. Bent,' said Andria, 'has a reception!'

'Rather,' said Arthur laughing. 'He means my portrait to give him a leg up.'

The portrait was so admirably lifelike that Andria for the moment forgot her resentment. Something of the same spirit which had stimulated the artist's brush in her case had helped him in her brother's.

A dozen richly arrayed ladies of mature charms were drinking tea in the studio and praising Bent's pictures. The painter had cultivated the class who hang in their dining-rooms imposing oil portraits of themselves in which all the accessories of lace and brocade and diamonds are religiously impressed on the prosperous canvas. He had thus acquired what his less lucky rivals called 'a big city practice.' Still he modified his painting to changes of taste. He had lately discovered that a slight caricature of Sir Joshua Reynolds quite fascinated his public. The simple trick of making a brand new picture vulgarly resemble an old master appealed to them as a stroke of genius. 'Mr. Bent makes you feel quite like one of your own ancestors,' simpered his lady admirers, whose effigies in high-waisted white dresses standing under brown trees on regal terraces hung over the sideboards at home.

The only man in the studio except Arthur, who at once began to admire his own portrait with the

unstinted joy youth takes in its own image, was Beauchamp Pettit, art critic of the *Banner*.

Pettit in his youth had studied mechanical drawing in an engineer's office, with so much ill-success, that as a counterpoise he had learnt Pitman's Shorthand, on which accomplishment he had finally drifted into the office of the *Banner* as a junior reporter where, as a youth of tact with a taste for phraseology, he succeeded in pleasing his editor.

One day on an emergency he did some of the minor picture shows, and acquitted himself with so much credit that his chief sent for him and said: 'Mr. Pettit, our art critic has accepted the editorship of a sporting magazine.'

'Indeed, sir,' said Pettit with an air of concern.

'Yes,' said the editor, 'and he'll live to regret it.'

Pettit looked acquiescence.

'You have no sympathy, I hope, with any of these new art cliques?' continued the great man, as he sat surrounded with a cascade of proofs.

'None sir.'

'You believe in the Royal Academy?'

'Implicitly.'

'You know something about drawing, I suppose?'

'Studied for some years, sir.'

'Then I think you'll do. We'll put you in to do the art notices next week. Meanwhile I would recommend you a course of Ruskin, and you might read up the President's lectures. Be careful not to give us away. Good-morning.'

Pettit left the editor's room a full-fledged art critic, determined to maintain the majesty of the British

Press in general, and of the organ he represented in particular.

Unfortunately he could scarcely tell an oil painting from a pastel, so he was wise enough to call his schoolfellow Peter Bent to the rescue. They had acquired the elements of Latin and the other accomplishments deemed necessary to 'a thorough commercial education' at the same private school at Margate.

'You may rely on me to help you all I can,' said Bent. 'I'm convinced the *Banner* could not have chosen a better man.'

This, so far as Bent was concerned, was true. So when he embarked on his useful career, Mr. Pettit had Peter Bent at his elbow, and the readers of the *Banner* ended in seeing pictures through Peter Bent's spectacles. Thus Pettit became a perfectly orthodox and 'safe' writer on art, and, recognising his obligation like an honest fellow, paid back Bent a hundred-fold and 'wrote up' whatever pictures that rapidly rising artist recommended to his and the public's approval.

These are the advantages that schoolday friendships sometimes bring!

Andria knew Pettit, and, on Bent's recommendation, had once regarded him as the embodiment of wisdom. He had learnt to summarise the subject of a picture into readable columns, and trotted in after the big painters like a judiciously applauding chorus, whilst he was careful enough to ignore the new men until his professional adviser gave him the hint that it was time.

But if Pettit had guessed Andria's thoughts he

would scarcely have shaken hands so complacently. Once she had turned to the *Banner* with respect, but now she ranked him with the other flatterers of her weakness, and had lost belief in 'our soundest art critic,' as Bent called his friend and ally.

'We are so delighted with your portrait, Miss Vincent,' he said. The 'we' meaning himself and leading judges of current art. 'Your brother's, too, is equally "convincing." Such excellent results in portraiture are uncommon in these reckless days of cheap impressionism. My old friend Peter Bent has never done anything better, and, as you know, some of the very best modern work comes out of this studio. I hope you are painting as assiduously as ever, Miss Vincent. I was struck with your life work at the last show here of student's work. Feeling, colour, drawing, modelling all promising. We shall look for you not far from the line at the "R.A." soon. The lady artists are beginning to come to the front nicely. We shall end in producing a British school of lady painters just as we have grown a school of lady novelists, with a distinct touch separating them from the men.'

'Manifest in the use of the present tense and a purely feminine vocabulary?' said Andria interrogatively, but with the ghost of a sneer.

'The man thinks I am a fool,' she thought. Her suspicion was groundless, for he only thought he was making himself agreeable, and that she was very pretty.

'When this female school does come,' she continued, 'will you judge it by the same standards as you use for the men?'

‘Art-criticism can make no distinction of sex,’ said Pettit. (Here Bent joined them.) ‘I was telling Miss Vincent, who has been ridiculing the idea of a distinctly feminine school of British art, Peter, that criticism can never make distinction of sex. Art is only a method of regarding the sum of things in nature and life. In painting, the feminine view has never been adequately represented. In the logical sequence of intellectual progress it must come.’

‘It may,’ said Bent dubiously.

‘If it were cut out of literature the loss wouldn’t be irreparable,’ said Andria.

Bent and Pettit were inclined to agree with her, but the former was surprised at her opinion.

‘That’s something she has picked up from Louis Otway,’ he thought. ‘It will be ten thousand pities if he makes her “viewy.”’

‘What a stern critic you are, Miss Vincent,’ he said. ‘I believe it must be from working alone. For a student nothing is so discouraging. When my classes are over you should take a rest. You must let me see what you are doing. May I come to-morrow?’

‘I should be grateful if you would, Mr. Bent.’

‘Shall I come too?’ asked Pettit, gallantly wagging his head.

‘No, Mr. Pettit, you would be too gentle a critic. I want a cudgelling by a stern master like Mr. Bent to bring me to my senses.’

But she intended that the cudgelling should be on the other side.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN his art school closed, Peter Bent found life very dull without Andria's bad drawing to correct. He watched her in fancy bending resolutely over her canvas, and vividly recalled the clustering, golden, brown curls at the nape of her charming neck, and the deepening gradations by which they darkened down to the richer chestnut of her shapely head. He knew that when a man of his age recorded trifles of this kind, his moorings in the rocks of bachelorhood were insecure. Carter's fate had set him pondering. Why had she refused him? Might it not be that she had other and higher ambitions than merely social ones? Andria's chief interest in life lay centred in art, but she was bound in time to discover her innate incapacity for serious painting. From this point, by one of those mental long jumps that enable a man to bound over the gaps in the probable, his line of argument assumed a rosier hue. It was possible that a vicarious triumph in the art might compensate for the lack of a personal one. And so the quiet self-contained painter found himself rushing over the slope in Carter's track. A bubble of vanity tickled his brain and made him mistake his influence as an art-master for an entirely different force. Not once or twice in his life does a man play the part of Alnaschar. Some grow so used to

the rôle that they are scarcely startled by the crash of the shattered crockery.

Thus Peter Bent and Andria Vincent met for an explanation on two totally different and antagonistic planes of feeling.

Andria had prepared her drawings and paintings like so many *pièces de conviction* in her case against Bent, whilst he had marshalled his rose-coloured arguments so insistently that they seemed to presage victory the moment he pressed the electric bell.

In the drawing-room he found Mrs. Vincent, who promptly expressed delight that 'her children's portraits did Mr. Bent so much credit.' He rightly understood her to mean that they were handsome enough to deserve painting at his skilled hands, and accepted the phrase as a two-edged compliment.

'They are splendid specimens of the race, Mrs. Vincent. I am proud to paint them.'

'I am very proud of them,' she said, complacently resuming her crewel work. 'They are such excellent children too! Arthur's spirits are a little high, of course, and he shows no particular desire to enter any of the professions. He leaves Oxford next term, you know. Of course he might have done a little more work there, but one cannot expect everything. Andria—well, as I told her aunt, Andria, you know, *is* Andria.'

'There is no doubt about that,' thought Bent, whose own wider range of definition could scarcely take him further.

'I am so glad that Andria gets on nicely with her painting,' continued Mrs. Vincent, placidly enjoying her wools, which agreeably blunted the edge of her

attention, and made a soothing atmosphere for her armchair. 'It is a very nice occupation for her. She does so love her paints!'

This was comforting.

'Miss Vincent is quite an enthusiast,' said Bent.

'That is what I am anxious about. I do hope you will not let her take her painting too seriously. Enthusiasm is all very well in its right place, but it would be a great pity for her to strain her eyes. She comes back sometimes quite tired. Now I am very fond of needlework myself, and know how colours try the eyes. They all seem to run into one another just like liquids. Have you ever noticed that, Mr. Bent?'

'Frequently; it is a sign one ought to leave off.'

'Andria is one of those girls who never know when to leave off. Arthur has remarked it too. "Andria," he says, "never knows when she is beaten."'

Mrs. Vincent knitted placidly, and then resumed. 'I have often heard her say that some of the happiest hours of her life have been spent in your studio. Both my children have such nice simple tastes. But I shouldn't like her to become a professional painter. I know it is a very honourable calling, but I don't approve of this restless modern spirit that is diverting the young people's attention from domestic life.'

Here it occurred to Mrs. Vincent, whose conversations took the form of a soliloquy, that her daughter would be very angry with her for 'talking about her like this,' and she was loyal enough to stop.

'But Andria is waiting up in her painting-room for you—quite a nice attic, where the footman used to sleep. You see Arthur is always away, and Andria

prefers women to wait, so we parted with George. Would you mind ringing for Thorpe, she shall show you up. Andria wants your advice badly. Mr. Otway saw her pictures last week, and I believe he said something about them which rather upset her. You know he doesn't like popular painting very much. It is a pity, for he is such a remarkable man, and his book is ever so deep. I have not finished it yet. One finds so very little time for sound reading. Take Mr. Bent up to Miss Vincent's studio, Thorpe. By the time you come down to tea, Mr. Bent, I shall have finished this rose.'

Mrs. Vincent's prattle had sounded a long way off, so closely were his thoughts concentrated on the prospects of his interview with her daughter. He found her in the middle of the bare floor surrounded by her canvases. When he saw her face, and the resolute tightening of her mouth, his roseate dreams faded back towards the habitual hue of practical existence.

'You see I have come as I promised,' he said rather lamely, feeling he was beginning the conversation in the wrong key. 'Some bother with the foreshortening, I suppose, or with one of those tiresome compositions.'

'All my painting troubles,' she answered, 'appear to have come to a climax at once. I have discovered that I am a complete failure, and that I shall never paint well enough to be an artist.'

'My dear Miss Vincent,' he stammered, 'I'm sure——'

But she interrupted him. 'You have been kind enough, Mr. Bent, from your point of view, but you

would have been far kinder to let me know I never could be anything better than a mere dabbling amateur.'

'But I really think you have been getting on nicely, Miss Vincent. You take far too desponding view of your attainments and prospects.'

'All my drawing is feeble, all my colour is bad, all my curved surfaces look flat, and, as for my compositions—they are simply ridiculous. Everyone has humoured me; no one ever treated my ambitious project of becoming an artist seriously. And I was as earnest as you told me you used to be when you first entered the Academy school.'

Bent rather posed to his pupils on the subject of his early ardour. It is a temptation few masters can withstand.

'But I never thoroughly realised that you had any intention of working seriously, Miss Vincent,' he said.

'But I had. I wanted a profession, painting was the only one that had any attractions for me. Will you be good enough to look at my work and tell me, on your honour, whether you see a single sign of promise there.'

Bent looked at the array of drawings hopelessly. South Kensington and the allied institutions turn out amateurs of Andria's calibre by the hundred dozen.

'Can this sort of thing lead to anything?' she asked, with a contemptuous wave of her hand at her work.

'It would lead, of course, to far more technical skill than you have acquired. It is always worth cultivating art for art's sake.'

But this sounded like one of the tinkling phrases nurses throw to children to keep them quiet, and she was tired of the 'hey-diddle diddles' of art.

'I was thinking of my own sake, which is another name perhaps for my own vanity. Let us take the commercial view of the question. Do you see any prospect of my ever earning an income by painting?'

'He will understand what I mean now,' she thought.

'No one can rely absolutely on making an income by painting,' he answered feebly.

But his weakness only urged her on to the attack.

'On my last birthday I resolved to devote my life to painting. I suppose we all must map out our lives. Have I made a mistake? Do you see evidence of promise in my work to encourage me to make the sacrifice?'

'No, by Heaven! I don't,' he exclaimed, forgetting years of restraint in the outburst. 'You are far too beautiful to devote yourself to anything else but life. Painting! What's the good of painting unless you have genius? It's worth no woman's while to stipple her youth away. To let you waste your magnificent vitality on it would be criminal. I only encouraged you to draw because, because—' and Bent felt a new force compelling him to unburden his half-atrophied heart—'because I love you.'

Then as Bent looked at Andria through his newly loosened emotions, he saw on her face nothing but astonishment framed in uneasiness. The 'vicarious triumph' theory had shattered itself on the rocks of fact.

'I ought not to have said this, at least not so suddenly,' he resumed, since she found no reply. 'But it has been growing up in me almost without my being aware of it. But I feel we have much in common, and——'

But Andria stopped him.

'Please don't say any more, it is much better not. I regarded you as a friend, a true friend, or I should never have told you of my poor frustrated ambitions. It will be so much more comfortable, Mr. Bent, if we don't speak any more about it. I am deeply flattered at what you have said, but I feel it's impossible.'

'But why?' said the poor man feebly, repeating the question that Carter had asked.

'Because it would be a mistake for which there is no remedy, Mr. Bent.'

Then seeing the need of greater clearness she added emphatically, 'I have no wish to be married.'

'Is it quite useless to think of it?'

'Yes, and would be very painful. There is only one thing to be said before we forget it altogether. Never let my mother, or Arthur, or any one know.'

'All right,' said the reawakened lover, with a glimmering perception of the infelicity of his acquiescence shining through his disappointment. 'I suppose I could not expect any other answer.'

Andria said nothing, but thought, 'surely I never encouraged you to expect one.'

The element of the ridiculous in the situation robbed it of all romance. It seemed to her the proposal was exactly in the form one would expect it from Mr.



Bent. It had a commonplace resemblance to Mr. Carter's.

'But we can still be friends, I hope, Miss Vincent,' he added, seeing more consolation in that unexciting relationship than would have been possible if he had been a younger man.

'Of course we can,' she answered. 'Better friends, perhaps, than ever.'

But a strong rapid step was heard mounting the stairs, and Arthur Vincent burst into the room. 'Aw'fly glad to see you, Peter,' he said. 'A brilliant idea has just occurred to me. We are going down to Portruthic next week; come too. I'll teach you golf.'

'Impossible,' said Bent, the weight of Andria's rejection pushing him from present hope of her society. 'I've arranged to go to Homburg.'

'What on earth for?' asked Arthur in surprise. 'You're fit enough.'

'The waters suit me, you know.'

'Oh, bother Homburg!' exclaimed Arthur, who was accustomed to arrange other men's affairs to suit his own convenience and to find the result perfection. 'I have set my mind on taking you to Portruthic. How you would enjoy it! The finest coast scenery on the west, and not a nigger or a band-stand within twenty miles! When you were tired of golf you might take on Andria's sketches as a humorous diversion.'

'That form of mirth will be lost henceforth,' said Andria, 'for I have decided to give up painting.'

'What a morning of surprises!' exclaimed her brother; 'in the name of all the muses, why?'

'Because I have discovered I have no talent.'

'But surely that oughtn't to put you off?' said he satirically. 'What will you take up instead?'

'Nothing,' said his sister.

'But do you permit your recruits to desert like this?' he asked, turning to Bent.

'I have no option,' replied the painter uncomfortably.

'Then there is no discipline extant.'

Arthur Vincent returned again and again to the charge, but Peter Bent persistently replied 'Homburg' till the famous watering-place seemed to advertise the delicacy of his baffled attitude towards Andria.

CHAPTER IX

IN the last week of July the Vincents went to Port-ruthic, to spend the rest of the summer and the beginning of the autumn in a pretty cottage overlooking the bay.

Andria had not forgotten that both Louis Otway and Peter Bent had urged her, although in different keys, to learn how to live instead of paint. The artist, she had half inferred, considered that this art might be acquired by marrying him. According to Otway's *Science and Civilisation* she need only follow the instincts of nature as modern reason, disentangled from theology, interprets them. Reduced to its simplest proportions this seems very much like framing her conduct to suit her own inclinations. But, on further reflection, she decided this was a non-moral doctrine, since the critics had allowed that Otway's teaching was in the main altruistic. Finally she thought of writing to the philosopher for further explanation, and told her brother of her intention. He was amused.

'You are like the young ladies who ask the new curate to explain intricate points of doctrine in his "beautiful sermons,"' said Arthur laughing.

Andria coloured slightly.

'But do you think it would be very ridiculous?' she asked.

'Not if you really want to know,' he answered, wondering at her sudden diffidence.

'If Otway is sure of his own meaning no doubt he will be able to tell you, but even philosophers have an oscillating understanding. The rules of their game are never fixed.'

'That is the wisdom of your "Final Schools," Arthur?'

'Yes, but added to the experience of a lifetime.'

Her brother was lying lazily on his back by the sea, which lapped on the sand at his feet, finding it too hot to think of anything with more than half a languid mind. Beneath the brim of a tilted straw hat he could see his sister's beautiful face, and remembering how his album at Oxford was always robbed of her portrait, his thoughts drifted to her marriage, to 'poor old Carter,' in African exile on her account, and to Peter Bent, whom he suspected of a secret and well-concealed affection for her, and thus half-dreaming and half-reflecting, he drifted to the frontiers of mid-day sleep, scarcely hearing her questions.

'Would you write to Mr. Otway if you were me, Arthur?'

'Rather.'

'Rather what, you vulgar boy?'

'Rather write.'

'To whom?'

'To poor old Carter.'

'Don't be silly, wake up, we were speaking of Mr. Otway.'

'Oh yes. I remember. Write by all means now and let me sleep.'

Then Andria rose, walked slowly up the steep cliff

path to the cottage, and wrote her first letter to Louis Otway. She remembered all he had said that afternoon in her studio as well as his manner of saying it. To learn how to live was much more important than to learn how to paint, and that she would never be happy until she had 'acquired a wholesome pagan indifference to all kinds of intellectual noise.' Her letter covered eight sheets of paper, and because he was a man of letters she wrote only on one side of the page. When she had finished it she re-read it carefully. It was like a clever schoolgirl's essay on the philosophy of living for a young woman, as suggested by the teachings of *Civilisation and Science*.

Mrs. Vincent was sitting in the garden in the shade dozing over her crewel work, the whole of Portruthic was blinking somnolently in the noon-day heat; even the sea, stretching away to the steep horizon in which it was hazily merged, lay like a silver sheet wrapping the hidden limbs of the lazy land deep in a noon-day dream. Andria seemed to herself the only restless thing within the great circle of the encircling calm.

When her letter was finished she stepped into the steep village street to post it. In the gardens full of bright flowers and later roses, she heard the bees humming. Portruthic never changed. The same wrinkled faces stood at the low doorways, the same nasturtiums blazed in the window-boxes, all seemed immutable in Andria's eyes save her own widening experience.

For the last ten years almost without a break she had spent a part of the summer at Portruthic, and at the blacksmith's shop, shouldered by the big oak, the

churchyard, the crumbling Norman church with the ancient graves, the languid flutter and movement of the calm village life, sun-steeped as then in summer indolence, had become links in a delicate chain of realities to measure the changes of her growing perceptions. The place with its garnered associations was dear to her. Certainly Portruthic was deep in its 'pagan indifference to all forms of intellectual noise.'

The old women in their cottages, whose doors the garden flowers seemed invading in coloured battalions, and the fishermen on the stone quay of the little harbour, where no self-respecting ship ever entered unless obliged by stress of weather, all knew Andria and smiled at her as she passed.

Returning from the post-office she met her brother. 'You ought,' she said, 'to have a sunstroke.'

'The sun only ripens my brain like it does the hazelnuts and the apples,' said he laughing. 'It mesmerised me, however, and when I recovered with the aid of a sand-fly which tickled my nose I found you had departed. You were asking me philosophic conundrums, or I should never have succumbed.'

'I took your advice and wrote to Mr. Otway,' she said.

'I refuse to accept the responsibility of that letter. You know what happens sometimes to the curate whom perplexed young ladies harry with their doubts.'

'No, I'm tired of your curate, and forget all the traditional jokes.'

'Then I will tell you. Sometimes, forsaking celibacy he succumbs, at others he escapes into the next

parish. Similarly there are two roads open to a philosopher, even when he despises your sex.'

'Your satire has all the elegance one expects from the sporting undergraduate,' said his sister reddening, for she was so much in earnest, that the jocular view of her motive remained far away on the fringes of her mind, invisible unless dragged to light by the heavy hand of youthful irony.

'But what will Otway say,' wondered Arthur, 'if he lives up to his reputation?'

'If I knew I should not have written.'

The answer came on the evening of the following day. Otway had replied by return of post. He wrote in a half-playful strain, that suggested she was taking the matter too seriously. 'The whole of my theory of life,' he said, 'may be condensed in this crude formula, Be good, accept the inevitable, don't make a fuss and you will be fairly contented! No one, not even its author, can extract this meaning from *Civilisation and Science*, but it is a good receipt to cure restlessness, nor can philosophy as a practical accompaniment of life take us much farther.'

In another paragraph he added:

'I hope you will not think me a bore if I am discovered some fine morning on the Portruthic strand. You have advertised the place so well that you must not be astonished if it becomes crowded by the profane.'

'The prophet,' said Arthur, when he heard it, 'is coming to his disciple.'

Andria, feeling foolish, held her peace.

Mrs. Vincent, however, saw her own influence in the projected visit.

'I tempted Mr. Otway with the charms of this place,' she said. 'I am glad he is coming. His conversation is so improving. It is a pity that we have not a spare room, but the hotel is quite comfortable for a bachelor.'

'Otway's ethical recipes,' said Arthur, 'are quite the best substitutes for theology. Andria will find them a great comfort.'

And so for several days he teased his sister, until the claims of county cricket found him more serious occupation.

CHAPTER X

OTWAY had thrown himself so entirely into his work that the sum of his accumulated energies had been consumed, and with it the feeling of youth. There may be dissipation in excessive toil as well as in a lower form of self-indulgence. A similar blunting effect on the keen edge of enjoyment is produced by both. In his reputation he had found his reward for his squandered youth. But he knew greater things still were expected of him. His friends regarded *Science and Civilisation* as merely the first effort of a very original and powerful mind, and as a portent of greater things to follow, although its author scarcely shared their sanguine anticipations. He felt like one who, after infinite toil, having delivered a message of doubtful import, has lost the courage for another prolonged intellectual journey, and so his literary future filled him with secret misgivings. And thus he was waiting for the return of that inner breath of encouragement which, five years before, had driven him to undertake his first arduous voyage on the solemn philosophic seas. 'There is,' he said, 'with the lotus-eaters, whilst longing for a youthful and all-conquering wave of emotion to sweep him far away from the arid sands of shifting philosophies, "no joy but calm."' But he had studied men and his institutions

through a microscope of distrustful criticism till faith in their future was lost. For the grey melancholy which steams up from human turmoil, the fumes of jealousy, of race hatred, of greed and ignorance, of wrongs unrighted, of sufferings incurable, had invaded his soul and swamped it with pessimism. He knew that his book had succeeded because he had unconsciously written it as a dubious optimist, but the doctrines of despair, triumphantly trampled under his feet in its pages, had risen again and devoured their temporary conqueror. Thus it befell that he took small pleasure in an achievement which in his own mind seemed founded on insincerity, and dexterous casuistry. But through the tangled shades of his complex doubts he was beginning to see light. Hitherto no woman had exercised the slightest influence on his career. In his temperament there entered something of the sex-fear of the religious ascetic. Moreover his studious refinement had spared him the demoralising experience usually deemed requisite to complete a young man's knowledge of the world. The theory that it is necessary to roll in the mud in order to become acquainted with the dirt in the street was vigorously ridiculed in his chapter on non-moral worldly illusions. Hitherto he had escaped feminine influence, chiefly because physical beauty had never appealed to his senses.

Had any other pretty woman but Andria attacked him with a long interrogative letter on his philosophy he would probably have politely evaded the encounter. Such letters from unknown correspondents were common enough in his experience. Sometimes they led to a tiresome correspondence, or even in bad cases, to the

publication of his explanatory *dicta* in the papers by the enterprising seeker after knowledge who had 'drawn' him. But Andria's appeal flattered him. He knew she was unaffected and earnest, and without a satisfying anchor for her abundant physical and mental energies. The young woman who reads Shelley in one mood and Darwin or Herbert Spencer in another, is no uncommon type, although when she has the beauty and splendid vitality of Andria she appears so. Otway therefore rather mistook the nature of his interest by vastly exaggerating its scholastic elements. He thought he had faintly discerned in her the effect of his teaching, and to study its influence and to direct its course on so splendid a subject was a new form of temptation, stimulating indeed, but not so entirely intellectual as he imagined. Thus, although Otway translated thought into action with difficulty, he started for Portruthic without a vestige of uneasiness, the real incentive being concealed under the thick speculative dust of his theories.

He arrived there at the peaceful moment when twilight coalesces with the soothing gloom of an August night. The scent of honeysuckle floated on the soft air mixed with the pungent odour from the bracken-covered hills which shut in the bay. The calm of the evening stole on him pleasantly. He sat on the terrace of the hotel, quietly smoking, hearing the soft lapping of the ripples against the stone quay, his thoughts, half projected, half retrospective, moved round Andria. The stars shone in the placid sky; the headlands across the bay were dimly defined against the faint light in the west. The world, contempla-

tive rather than melancholy, coerced him by its brooding calm to feel contempt for the fruitlessness of all that human action to whose dubious future his philosophy pointed.

The sky, the sea, the dim coast-line, whispered, 'You know nothing; you will know nothing; nothing can be known.'

Lately he had slept ill, but that night he fell into a dreamless sleep, not waking until the sun streamed in at his unshaded windows. Rising, he found the sea sparkling gladly and nature's face bearing a braver message to all her children.

After breakfast he strolled out into the sunshine to the coastguard station on the western limit of the narrow bay where the man on duty, leaning against the tar-stained boat-house, glass in hand, fixed a languidly inquiring eye on the horizon.

'Fine morning, sir,' said the sailor.

'Beautiful,' returned Otway. 'Are there many visitors at Portruthic?'

'A goodish few, sir. The same families mostly comes every year.'

'Where does Mrs. Vincent live?'

'Below there—Crag View it's called.'

He pointed to a low, white, creeper-covered cottage in a luxuriant garden that sloped down to the rocks, where a big patch of sunflowers grew within ten yards of the sea.

'You'll see the young lady and gentleman come out to bathe d'rectly,' said the coastguard. 'They mostly do about this time. There they are.'

Otway saw two tall figures issue from the clematis-clad porch. The taller a magnificently built young

man in a dark blue bathing dress, the other in a grey wrapper and a deep red cap.

'The one in blue's Mr. Arthur,' said the coast-guard. 'Her in the gown's the young lady. You'll see 'em swim. It's a sight!'

The grey figure discarded the long wrapper to a white-capped maid, and stood for a moment on the rocky margin a superbly graceful shape in bright red. The blue figure with a bound and a whoop of high spirits, dived into the water darkling under the overshadowing crags, and the girl followed.

'They can dive!' said the coastguard with the air of a man who has a local right in the exhibition.

'But is it safe amongst all those rocks?'

'Safe enough when you know the lie of 'em. They'll swim out to that there buoy. The young lady swims almost as fast as the young gen'leman.'

Then with an interest out of proportion with the proceeding, the philosopher watched the red cap and the brown head making strongly for the floating platform moored some seventy yards from the shore.

'That's Mr. Arthur getting up. There! in two movements. Neat, ain't it?'

The coastguard fixed his glass with the mild interest of one beholding a familiar incident on the little centre of vigorous life that flashed animation over the green waters of the bay.

Arthur, stooping over the floating platform, stretched a muscular arm to his sister. In a moment she was standing in the sunshine beside him; their voices vibrant with the exhilaration of the sea reached Otway across the merrily splashing ripples.

'Look at 'em, sir!' said the coastguard, proudly handing his telescope. 'Ain't they a fine pair?'

Then across the disc of the strong sea-glass Arthur and Andria loomed clearly, the water streaming from down their shining limbs. From her slim white ankles to her lovely neck, a perfect type of womanhood, Andria's beauty flashed upon the philosopher with a vividness that set his heart beating. '*O dea certe!*' whispered his memory. The bathers stood each at an extreme limit of the narrow floating platform, rocking the structure vigorously, until Andria's foot slipping on the wet planks, she half fell and half dived into the water, and began swimming to the shore. Her brother balanced himself a moment in an attitude of mimic triumph, glanced towards the cliff, then dived once more for the shore.

'They are always up to their pranks,' said the coastguard admiringly. 'Thank you kindly, sir,' he added, as Otway returned him his glass together with a shilling.

There could be no doubt of it. A warm, vivid, and youthful emotion was knocking at the philosopher's heart, swamping the asceticism of fifteen years of intellectual toil. Absorbed in theoretical schemes of life, the elemental and simple joys of existence had been overlooked. And so he walked along the shore in a mood of pleasant wonder, no longer trying to test and analyse, but simply following it with the unreasoning acquiescence of a child. Andria in her red bathing-dress shone like a bright image of youth and beauty on his imagination. The impression was unforgettable.

His foot was lighter, the pensive look changed for

one of alert expectancy, as he followed his pleasant musings along the rugged shore where the receding tide had left heaps of gleaming seaweed between the spaces of the tumbled rocks. Something had dispelled his melancholy. What was it? Soon a definite answer to his wonder came. Suddenly, sitting on a smooth-worn slab of grey stone reading, he came on Andria. She rose to meet him with pleased surprise.

'You have kept your promise,' she said, as they shook hands. 'I hope you will like the place.'

'I am charmed with it,' he said. 'Have you been painting?'

'No. You remember my resolve? You taught me to know when I am beaten.'

'What does Mr. Bent think of it?'

Andria looked slightly uncomfortable. She could scarcely tell him that.

'When he quite understood how serious I was he took much the same view of it as you; and told me to learn to live instead of trying to learn to paint.'

'Nature has taught you that already,' said Otway.

'But I have no scheme of life at all.'

'Then live without one. "Hang up philosophy," as Juliet says, Miss Vincent.'

'Ah, but Juliet was a whirlwind of embodied emotions. If she had had some of the friar's philosophy, she would never have slept in the Capulet's tomb.'

But she perceived he was treating the matter as a mild joke, and, remembering her letter, wondered uneasily whether it had struck him as a piece of young-womanly pedantry.

'I don't think you like women to be too much in earnest,' she said.

'This morning,' he answered, 'I walked to the coastguard station on that point, and saw two bathers, one in blue, the other in red.'

'Cardinal red?' asked Andria.

'I believe that was the shade,' he resumed, smiling. "That's Mr. Arthur and Miss Andria," said the coastguard; "they *can* dive!"'

'I suppose he lent you his telescope?' said Andria.

'He did; and I profited by the object lesson. You swam like young seals, and filled the whole bay with life and animation. I never saw two human beings more full of the joy of living before. Without knowing it you had solved the problem so far as it is possible.'

'Mere animal spirits,' said Andria. 'The Polar bear has similar moments of brief pleasure in his narrow tank when the cold begins. But the moment he thinks, his vast nostalgia oppresses him again. In the same way the Puritan within me cries out on the joy of living. There is no altruism in it.'

'Yes there is; only it is unconscious. It gives pleasure to withered philosophers like myself.'

'So do young puppies when they romp. Philosophy of this brand won't do for your new book, Mr. Otway.'

'Who knows? Perhaps in the coming Golden Age we shall need no guides to conduct but instinct.'

'It must be etherealised, then,' said Andria. 'If this innocent-looking Portruthic were ruled by instinct, it would be a howling wilderness in a generation. But how is your new book progressing?'

She wished for a serious conversation. He had only once been earnest with her, and that was when she had consulted him about her painting. Her active intelligence beset with doubts needed personal force to encourage and restrain it, and she fancied she had found this in Otway.

‘It is not progressing,’ he said. ‘I think we exaggerate the importance of books. In the form of speculative philosophy the public has more than it can carry. We are getting too far away from nature. Some day a great man will come before the world with a great secret—a secret compared to which Darwin’s discovery fades into insignificance—and we shall learn the futility of all philosophies. The truth will be found here.’

And he waved his hand with a gesture that embraced the sky, the sea, and the long lines of purple headlands.

‘Then you will never write another book, Mr. Otway?’

‘I shall probably write several; but the ghost of future knowledge will stand at my elbow to keep my dogmatism in check, and unless a metaphysician is allowed to dogmatise, you know he is never happy.’

And this was the first of many talks by the sea.

CHAPTER XI

OTWAY and Andria thought they were moving toward a complete mutual understanding. This is the commonest illusion of lovers who mistake affection for knowledge. Still the charm of the imaginary sympathy they shared gave a new aspect to nature and a deeper meaning to words. The monotonous sullenness of Otway's pessimism for a while was dispelled by Andria's vivid influence.

Otway had come to Portruthic for a fortnight; the fortnight was over, but still he lingered there, until at last he found himself face to face with an accepted visit to Scotland. Action of any sort was painful to Otway. Years of quiescent musing had blunted his power of decision. He was a dreamer such as the West rarely produces, and an ascetic of a type commoner in the East. His book had been written with his intelligence and in spite of his temperament. Now it was finished, and had brought him fame, he found in himself its embodied contradiction. He now thought his most brilliant chapters merely dexterous examples of special pleading. But of his secret robe of lethargic melancholy Andria saw merely the graceful shadow, and found it restful after the healthy confusion encompassing her own eager life.

Mrs. Vincent boasted of never interfering with her daughter's movements, 'having,' as she assured her

only sister, 'no other object than to see her suitably married.' Thus Otway and Andria were thrown without a barrier into each other's society. There seemed something inevitable in their intimacy.

'He is helping me in so many ways,' Andria told herself as an excuse for the pleasure his society gave her. He had power to turn her dullest moments into gold. He seemed so calmly wise, so tender to nature and life, so remote from the unpicturesque people whom she was accustomed to meet, and so she pictured him in a noble future 'warring with falsehood to the knife' in a pure atmosphere far above the vulgar crowd.

She knew he admired her, but his admiration was the essence of delicate flattery, and unlike the admiration of commoner minds to which she had grown accustomed.

Once her brother teasing her had said, 'I'll tell you why men admire you, Andria. It's just because you are a splendid animal.'

'O Arthur!' she exclaimed, pained because she thought there might be truth in his rude jest, 'you make me feel like one of Rubens's fat huntresses floundering on a big canvas at the Louvre before a crowd of Cook's tourists.'

Seeing that the thought vexed her, he good-naturedly tried to persuade her that she was far more like Virgil's picture of Dido on her way in the temple in the first book of *Aeneid*.

But Andria found no comfort in Virgil.

'It is no good,' she said, 'I shall feel like a squalid fat *frau* to the end of the chapter.'

That a woman could consent to be a sort of swagging chattel with no higher aim than to please the

duller men lowered the dignity of the whole sex in her eyes. Andria was proud of her beauty, often indeed delighted with its luxuriant impressions flashed back to her eyes by the mirror, but she resented the sensuous appraisal of it which she sometimes read in the coarser faces of loose-lipped men. Such tributes revolted her. But with Otway it was very different. On his ascetic and passionless face such a look was impossible. The baser appetites seemed to have burnt out by the fire of thought, so completely had the intellectual side of his nature triumphed there. Yet when his eyes were bent on her with a haunting look of wistful solicitude it set her own heart beating with vague anticipation of some completer explanation.

On the evening which Otway said was his last at Portruthic, he dined with Mrs. Vincent and her daughter. The prospect of so distinguished, well-to-do, and amiable a son-in-law pleased Mrs. Vincent, in spite of her son's disapproval. 'Andria,' she had said to him, 'is such a clever girl that she would be quite unhappy with a dull person for a husband.' And her son almost agreed with her in spite of the Oxford rumours.

Mrs. Vincent read her daughter's feelings with more accuracy than Andria suspected. The list of baffled admirers who had been weighed and found wanting was becoming over long, and she dreaded being the mother of a restless old maid. Had she dared she would have discussed the evils of a prolonged spinsterhood openly, but she was rather afraid of Andria, who, after all, had 'the right to be difficult,' and so, like a wise lady, she thought much more than she said.

on his first morning at Portruthic, he had seen her dive.

The feathery tamarisk hedge scarcely rustled in the stillness. Above from the open windows of the dining-room, a band of light fell on the shrubs revealing the irrationally active moths flitting aimlessly towards the shining centre of their excitement.

'How calm it is,' said Otway, looking down on the sea, colourless in the growing gloom.

Splash! splash! splash! went the wavelets as though in petulant expostulation with the great peace their petty restlessness left unbroken. Andria's white dress shone softly through the darkness; over her bare arms and shoulders she had thrown a soft silk wrap. Her head was uncovered, and her beauty seemed to him to fill the night. They sat on a rustic seat half concealed among thick shrubs. Faintly pungent odours stirred in the leaves. Dewy odours from the upland orchards mixed with the breath of the sea. The world was full of summer life, only the sea grey and mysterious, whispered the story of mistrust and doubt.

Otway's mind turned to the future, then to the past; but found ease only in the present.

'Why should all my life,' he wondered, 'be spent in futile wanderings across the bleak interminable plains of doubt?'

So they mused, each happy in the other's presence, till the fragrant silence swallowed them up, and the dusks of evening deepened to the glooms of night.

'Miss Vincent!' he said at last, to break the spell.

'Yes.'

Her voice seemed altered. Her white figure was

outlined against the shrubs and her face was turned to the sea.

‘Would it be impertinent to ask you of what you were thinking?’

‘I could not tell you. Perhaps I was wondering what the world is expecting to happen this quiet evening.’

This time the long silence weighed upon her. She felt that a human force was gathering under the veil of the intense repose.

At last she could bear it no longer.

‘I think,’ she said, ‘I will go in.’

And she half rose from her seat.

‘Please, stay,’ he said. ‘I have never been so happy before.’

He felt his blood flowing warmly through his veins. The scent of the roses in her breast, like the sense of his own reviving youth, reached him, adding to the witchery surrounding her.

‘Is it,’ he said, ‘because love has been kept out of my life that to-night I find myself in an enchanted circle where nothing else stirs?’

She sat motionless, but tremulously happy, his long slender fingers folded round her own.

‘Andria! Andria! Andria!’ he said, but she knew he needed no answer. ‘I love your name. I love you, for you have taught me how to live. Pity me and love me too.’

‘I do love you,’ she said.

And then they exchanged the first kiss of love either had ever felt.

And so they sat in brief bliss, unconscious of the flight of time till Mrs. Vincent’s voice summoned them to the house.

CHAPTER XII

THE four months following his engagement were the pleasantest in Otway's life. For ten years he had been a solitary wanderer in the wilderness of abstract ideas where the warm-blooded realities had been reduced to shadows, and love had been merely a synonym for an instinct. Now it had become a fact beside which all triumphs of the intellect seemed to fade into insignificance. There were moments when the change almost bewildered him, and he felt like one who has discovered a new sense of which he has still to learn the use.

Once to explain this feeling he quoted Browning.

‘ Yes ! there came floating by
Me, who lay floating too,
Such a strange butterfly !
Creature as dear as new.’

‘ I,’ he said, ‘ am the Amphibian, the creature with the membraned sun-suffused wings is Andria.’

And she thought the compliment charming. Yet the unfreezing of his nature, half-congealed by endless introspection, was invisible to her eyes.

Her ambition for him was boundless, but whenever she wished to speak of his future achievements he checked her ardour.

He was content with the present. ‘ Was it not all

they could be sure of?' 'Ever since I learnt to read,' he said, 'I have been trying to catch the future, and perhaps it has made me a little tired.'

'And the new book not even begun?'


'No, it is nothing more than a tight string across my mind's horizon. A psychological clothes-line for the damp theories to hang on. I am in the Elysian fields here with you, Andria. Let me enjoy my holiday.'

'All your life should be a holiday like those days at Portruthic if I could make it so,' she answered affectionately. 'But you have to climb to the highest mountain tops of knowledge, and plant your flag there. I shall sit with the crowd in the lazy valley and die of pride.'

And so, for a space, in an enchanted world where all his ancient cares grew light as gossamer, he moved towards his wedding day, the material side of it looming more oppressively to the front as it approached. Learned dons, his colleagues, sent him pompous silver presents, and the meaner newspapers prattled a good deal of the coming match.

From the worldly point of view nothing could have been more satisfactory. Otway had inherited a modest fortune from his father, a distinguished physician, and Andria, under her father's will, succeeded to £500 a year on her marriage.

That a man of means should write a book on scientific sociology and, moreover, live a life of self-denying toil, remote from the 'fat things' which Carlyle assures, 'the devil prepares for his elect,' struck the little world cognisant of the fact as supremely odd. That he should marry a beautiful and accomplished



girl like any ordinary mortal also excited some wonder, for Otway's acquaintance had persuaded themselves that his only marriage would be to some chair of philosophy.

'Never expected an old philosopher like yourself would marry,' said a college friend. 'Don't mean old in years, you know, but in wisdom.'

At Oxford, where Otway had enjoyed the reputation of an agnostic S. Kevin, it was believed that a cryptic form of misogyny, confessed to none, but suspected by all his college contemporaries, was at the back of his attitude towards women.

But when the engagement was announced, Arthur, whom these rumours had disquieted, decided that they must be baseless scandals which the fact of his marriage disproved.

In revenge he teased his sister.

'I hope,' he said, 'you will permit me to call you "My Lady Galahad."'

'I can see nothing funny in a contempt for self-indulgence,' she protested a little hotly.

And then, like a wise young man, her brother concealed his mirth, which had its roots in the squalid chatter of the smoking-room, unmeet for his sister's ear.

Otway was not ignorant of the gossip of the college common-room, and the club, concerning himself, although he misunderstood its nature.

'My friends,' he said, 'seem to regard me as a modern edition of Casaubon, and you as a self-immolating Dorothea.'

'How foolish,' said Andria, smiling; 'I am barely eight years younger than you.'

One afternoon, just before their marriage, when they were talking over the fire in the Vincents' drawing-room, the portraits of Andria and her brother arrived from Bent's studio. Since the announcement Andria had not seen the painter. The letter accompanying the pictures broke the silence of three months. Enclosed was a note from Carter just returned from his African trip. When she had read them, she handed them to Otway. Bent said:

'DEAR MISS VINCENT,—Will you accept your portrait as my wedding gift? Although I understand that Mr. Otway cares little for modern painting I am still convinced that I could send you nothing that would give him equal pleasure.

'I wish you both every happiness, and much regret that my enforced absence in Paris on business will prevent me from being present at your wedding.

'The portrait of your brother is the gift of Mr. Carter, who commissioned me to paint it before he left England last summer.—Yours sincerely,

'PETER BENT.'

Whilst Andria was reading, Otway surveyed the portraits which had been placed on an ottoman under the shaded rays of the electric light.

'Yours,' he said, 'is a noble picture. I have seen nothing of Mr. Bent's to equal it.'

'Here is his letter,' she said. 'Congratulatory letters are apparently difficult to write.'

'Mr. Bent might have omitted his shaft about my not caring for modern pictures. Your mother misquoted me somewhat and left out all my reservations.'

Then he read Carter's note:

'MY DEAR MISS VINCENT,—Will you accept the portrait of your brother which I commissioned Mr. Bent (under the bond of secrecy) to paint for me? I send it with my warmest congratulations and sincerest wishes for your future happiness. Yours very truly,
'REGINALD CARTER.'

On the other side of the paper was a postscript which Andria in her haste had missed. It said, 'I returned from the Cape two days ago, clothed and almost in my right mind. I hope that you have long since forgiven me for the mistake I made.'

'I think you missed the postscript,' said Otway. And he read it aloud. 'Why does he assure you of his recovered sanity?'

Andria blushed.

'Some nonsense—I cannot remember.'

Arthur's entrance, however, spared Andria further explanation, and threw sufficient light on the incident.

'What!' he exclaimed. 'Our portraits! Bent given them?'

'Mr. Bent gives my portrait, Mr. Carter yours.'

'What bricks! They are ripping ones! I call it awfully generous. Poor old Carter though! He's back then?'

'Yes.'

'Carter, you know,' he explained to Otway, 'went to Afric's sunny climes to cure "a sorrow-laden heart" and look out for mining shares. But I dare say you know all about that. There will be a small crowd of defeated but generous rivals in church, I hope you won't mind.'

'I shall regard their presence as a compliment,' the

other answered, looking at Andria, who much disliked the drift of the conversation.

‘I hope Peter will be sufficiently recovered to send my portrait to the Academy,’ continued Arthur. ‘I can’t afford to miss the advertisement. I’m reading for the Bar, and want the solicitors to see my forensic face.’

‘You will find your jocular view of life of great service in a profession where it is quite as necessary as the rudiments of Roman law,’ said Otway.

‘Philosophy’s the only form of human activity where wit is superfluous,’ returned Arthur. ‘This is the experience of my “Final Schools” which plunged one in the deepest melancholy. If you had been my examiner I’m convinced you would have sent me up a “class” out of sheer pity, Otway.’

‘I might have been compelled to “plough” you as a profane young Philistine,’ said Otway.

‘In that case I should have refused to give Andria away.’

‘I had forgotten that contingency,’ said Otway.

Andria had listened a little uneasily. She did not like her brother to chaff Otway, and she took the first opportunity of explaining to him that this apparent want of respect was merely a manifestation of Arthur’s high spirits.

‘His amiable savagery is not displeasing,’ said Otway. ‘He is the best specimen of the modern gladiator I have met, and has every possible temptation to make mouths at all the forms of inductive reasoning against which university discipline has driven him.’

CHAPTER XIII

‘THE chief danger of marriages of affection,’ said Otway in his book, ‘lies in their unfulfilled expectations. Love idealises, marriage realises, and thus, even when the strength of affection lasts, the tenderest souls are compelled to recognise inevitable discrepancies between their present and the unfulfilled hope of the past.’

Andria and Otway were married in the dull English mid-winter, and went for a lengthened tour to Italy and the south. In the blue Mediterranean her husband found a fitting background for his beautiful and high spirited wife, for the vigour of her unblemished youth and the courage of undefeated hopes. But neither sea, nor sun, nor ancient promontories, white with the pollen-scattering heather, could bring back to Otway the evanescent sense of trust in himself and the scheme of the world which had possessed him when he first sat down to write *Science and Civilisation*. Andria’s influence could only kindle for a space the torch his long labours had almost burnt out; there was no permanence in the pale thin flame.

In his soft dark hair the scattered streaks of grey were scarcely visible, and outwardly Otway was a young man still with a future in which fame seemed assured. To this Andria looked forward with pleasure,

but he with doubt, misgiving, and unspoken contempt. Either from some invisible flaw in his physical health, or an analogous fleck in the perfect sanity of his mind, Otway felt that his power of will was broken. Through ten laborious years he had tried to believe in the highest destiny of humanity. His brilliant effort to see light in the darkness had captivated many other ardent souls besides Andria's. But he no longer had faith in the theories, so eminently flattering to human reason, the promulgation of which had brought him fame, and lacked the courage as well as the power to publicly retrace his steps and join the gloomy camp of Schopenhauer and Hartmann. Thus, whilst his whole mental equipment was unstable and shifting as light sand, Andria, unconscious of the philosophic welter oppressing him, fully believed in the unbroken intellectual continuity of the outwardly self-contained author of *Science and Civilisation*. Thus she had to discover that she had been captivated by the side of his mind now practically dead, whither her intelligence had led, her affections had recklessly followed. Some day the debt must be paid.

Thus the three months of pleasant wandering did something to dissipate Andria's illusion that she perfectly understood her husband whilst it materially increased his distrust. It pleased him, however, to see her enthusiasm kindling before some picture, statue, or historic landscape, and he brought all his wide reading to aid her imagination.

In April Mr. and Mrs. Otway returned to London, and settled down in the large, roomy, old-fashioned house inherited by Otway from his father, the physician whose practice had flourished over that opulent

region which is bounded on the east by Bond Street and on the west by Park Lane. Andria would perhaps have preferred a brighter and less imposing abode, but the big consulting-room made an admirable library for her husband, and the problem how best to relieve the forbidding aspect of the lofty apartment was interesting in its gradual although somewhat costly solution. Before the beginning of May all the walls, ceilings, and staircases had ceased to ache under the burden of intense respectability they had rigidly carried for so many years. Otway had lost his mother when he was a lad, and no woman's hand had tried to dispel the blight of early Victorian taste. The big drawing-room alone shook itself entirely free from the chain of dead fashions, becoming a charming apartment of blended yellows and greens.

When the upholsterers had finally departed, and a small forest of palms had broken up the stern rectangular lines with their branches, Andria brought Otway up from his study to see it. The scheme was all her own, and, as he wished, had been carried out without consulting with him.

'If you don't like it I shall be horribly disappointed,' she said, as they mounted the stairs side by side.

'You have silenced all my adverse criticisms,' he said, smiling. 'Only a fanatic for truth would be silenced after such a threat.'

'But you told me the truth about my painting, so I trust you. Now you must prepare for a shock. Old household gods have been banished from their place of honour to obscure attics. The poor room was aching for a new life, and I have given it one. Look !'

She opened the door, and they entered.

'The transformation,' he said, 'is a little bewildering. You must give me time.'

He looked in vain for the familiar furniture, the solid, ungainly, but comfortable, friends of his boyhood. Most of it had vanished. Save for the few good water-colours now rehung on a more intelligent plan, the carved Chinese cabinet, 'the gift of a grateful patient,' and his mother's portrait in pastels, nothing remained. Andria's new grand piano, the wedding gift of her mother, usurped the place of the ancient and faded instrument whose tinkling lived in his memory. The dull reticence of the walls and carpets had gone: the whole air of the place suggested a desire for projection into the future as well as the idea of reckless oblivion of the past.

'It is a whirling revolution, isn't it?' she said, watching his grave face. 'Over the rest of the house lies the shadow of 1840, but here you have the eager restlessness of the modern spirit, hungry for change.'

Then she sat down at the piano, and played a fragment of Chopin full of jubilant defiance. The crepitating waves of melody seemed to stir the fragrant flower-scented air and to rustle the fern-fronds.

'You have given the room a new life,' he said as she ended abruptly.

'But sacrificed the old one. But that was inevitable. Do you think it pretty, Louis?'

'Yes, charming.'

'Really?'

'Yes. It is soft, luxurious, hospitable, full of flowers, promises, and harmonious cheerfulness, symbolic of the materialism of the day.'

‘But, Louis, I can’t see the materialism. I meant the room to appeal to the more delicate human fancies.’

‘So it does; but no modern human abode can escape the taint. You have replaced the materialism of the nineteenth century by that of the twentieth, that is all.’

‘That means you do not like it.’

‘No, I repeat your room is charming, and when your portrait returns from the Academy, and hangs opposite my mother’s, it will be quite perfect. Do you imagine that if the world were really convinced life was the transitory journey between two existences of immeasurable duration that any one would have troubled to invent the electric light? It is because man is unconsciously persuaded that this is his only foothold on time that he has learnt to build himself pretty nests. Thus the visible taint of materialism becomes a compliment to your taste and skill.’

‘You are laughing at me, Louis. There is nothing of this doctrine in your book.’

‘I omitted the chapter on the ethics of house-furnishing,’ he said; ‘but upholstery, as evidence of contemporary materialism, is an interesting problem.’

She had begun to notice his newly found habit of self-mockery and its increasing bitterness.

‘It will perhaps have the same value as the philosophy of clothes,’ she said. ‘But I hope you will not grow like my brother Arthur, and take a jocular view of life.’

‘Like the melancholy Jacques?’

‘Yes, but with an infusion of Dean Swift’s dislike for humanity.’

'But, Andria, when did you discover my dislike for humanity?'

'When we were in Venice, and heard a crowd of tourists in a steam launch singing a music-hall song.'

'I remember. They were annoying. But how can I hate humanity without hating myself, since I am the only specimen I thoroughly know?'

He was smiling, she more than half serious, anxious too to find the origin of the bitter spirit which ran through his conversation like a black thread through a string of white beads, forming a marked contrast to the more genial tone of his book.

'But do you love yourself, Louis?'

'Well, not beyond reason.'

Conscious that her marriage had brought her a sense of disappointment which she would not admit, she now watched her husband very closely, remembering nearly all he said.

'One must,' she reflected, 'judge a man by his work, not by every idle word he utters.'

All the same she sometimes feared the intellectual keenness of his mind was losing its edge from friction against some impalpable obstruction within him.

He spent many solitary hours in his library, but never told her what work he was doing.

'I suppose you are taking notes for your new book?' she said.

'Not exactly,' he answered. 'I'm rather like a man on the outskirts of a tropical forest with an axe too blunt to cut a path through the jungle. I am hesitating to advance, and trying to find something to sharpen its edge.'

CHAPTER XIV

THE first two years of the Otways' married life left it outwardly unchanged. Otway was generally believed to be writing a great book, whilst Andria gave him the encouragement great men of letters expect to find in their wives. This was the simplest interpretation of a conjugal relationship apparently unentangled.

But the few who were brought nearer the domestic centre by old association of friendship or affectionate curiosity, suspected the currents moving beneath the visible surface.

Andria made the most of her position as the wife of a distinguished exponent of sociology. Experience has led the world to expect dowdiness to ally itself with learning. A rough head, an ill-fitting dress, hygienic boots, a muddy complexion, in the eyes of the exigently 'smart' are supposed to represent the conjugal consolations of culture. When the wife of a philosopher deviates from this type the frivolous affect astonishment. Some of the fashionable callers at Bryton Street thought Andria 'a good deal too pretty for her place.' They expected to find a short-haired young woman blinking through a *pince-nez*, but went away impressed and astonished at her magnificent physical beauty.

But although as gracious and charming as ever, and

now an accomplished woman of the world, Andria was changed, though the change baffles definition.

'All periods of unrealised anticipation,' says Otway in *Science and Civilisation*, in the chapter on 'Influences,' 'are followed by an unconscious shifting of our mental horizons.' Andria almost knew this work by heart, her acquaintance with it, in fact, was occasionally mortifying to her husband, from whose feet all pride and pleasure in his earlier hypothesis was fast slipping.

But, too magnanimous to shoot him with the arrows he had forged for the philosophic quiver he had in secret thrown from his weary shoulders, she decided to make the best of an enviable position, and brilliantly filled her place in the half literary and half 'smart' society, to which she had been swept by the social currents around her.

Andria had changed, without knowing it, as a leaf changes imperceptibly when May treads on the heels of June. Her brother observed that the perfect candour existing between them before Andria's marriage had become modified in one or two aspects; there were obscure corners in her mind into which he could not see. He noticed that she ceased to talk of her husband's books, of his future achievements, and his growing influence.

'Don't you think Andria is altered, mother?' he said to Mrs. Vincent, one night when they were driving home from dinner at the Otways'.

His mother reflected a moment. The easy good nature which enabled her to glide in complacent comfort over the smooth surface of things prevented her from seeing beneath it.

'No,' she said, after a moment, 'that is, not more than most girls after marriage, and not nearly so much as some. She is rather steadier, perhaps.'

'Statelier, you mean. But I dare say a philosopher given to prolonged musings is a little oppressive to live with, and I fancy Andria is disappointed.'

But since Mrs. Vincent had encouraged the marriage she was determined to regard it as quite an ideal one.

'Nonsense! Andria is perfectly happy; no one could be more indulgent than Louis. Why! last week she sold her brougham, and bought a victoria without even consulting him. I should never have dared to do such a thing with your poor father, and I'm sure no one ever got on better than we did.'

'Otway's all right enough,' said Arthur, a little irritably, 'except that he sometimes looks like a Buddhist lost in contemplating the mystic syllable "Om." "Om" may amuse him, but Andria's tired of it.'

'But she was quite infatuated about Louis's learning before her marriage,' said Mrs. Vincent, 'and knew what she had to expect.'

'She knew what she expected, but she never knew what she would get.'

But his mother considered the distinction too trifling for discussion.

'If Andria were unhappy she would confide in me,' she answered.

'No she wouldn't,' said Arthur bluntly.

'Of course Andria wouldn't complain of Louis to me,' she admitted. 'But then he is so good to her that it couldn't be that. Why! they have every-

thing, or,' she added, thinking of the empty nursery, 'nearly everything. It would be positively wicked to be discontented. Louis, no doubt, begins to look a little older, and I fancy he isn't very strong. If Andria isn't contented, she ought to be, for no one could have a less exacting husband.'

An 'indulgent husband,' and a 'home of her own,' sub-understood an adequate income to 'keep it up,' constituted Mrs. Vincent's idea of the amount and nature of the happiness her sex has a right to expect.

'You are arguing that if Andria isn't happy she ought to be, and that's begging the question.'

'I'm perfectly sure she is happy, then,' retorted his mother, 'for no daughter of mine could possibly "grizzle!"'

'That's conclusive,' said Arthur, as he opened their door with his latch-key. 'Perhaps the spectacle of a philosopher wrestling with mighty thoughts is rather too much for domestic daily consumption. All I know is that Andria isn't the same.'

Meanwhile, Andria was hoping for some definite result of her husband's studies. He spent six hours a day in his room writing or reading, but since he had expressed a strong desire that she would not read his manuscripts, and, moreover, carefully kept them under lock and key, she had no idea of the nature of the work on which he was engaged. Once or twice passing his door she had heard him laughing a mirthless laugh, but had refrained from seeking an explanation. Gradually he had shut her off from the intellectual side of his life.

'What I have once published,' he said, soon after

their marriage, 'ceases to have the slightest interest for me.'

A few months later she observed that reference to his work disquieted him. To be complimented on its success by an acquaintance caused him discomfort, visible only to her vigilant eye. A sparing reader of the papers, he rarely saw the frequent allusions to his own writings, and was annoyed when she brought them under his notice.

Once when they were together in the reading-room of a seaside hotel on a wet day she showed him a reference to himself as the 'sanest and most comforting of modern thinkers.'

'I wish,' he said, 'you would not show me those things, they exasperate me.'

Then, recalling his apparent indifference to press comment when she had first known him, she was astonished.

'Why,' she asked, 'should it annoy you? The writer only says what most people think who have read your book.'

'The public,' he said, 'is pleased with me because I spared its feelings, and flattered its weakness. I was'—she noted the stress on the tense—'the Martin Tupper of modern thought.'

So, step by step, they reached a point in their daily life at which she forebore to try to force an entrance into the morbid circle enclosing him.

The shadow of a deep abstraction lay heavily upon him. With vague misgivings she watched this new personal atmosphere gathering round him, fitfully hoping the energies active beneath would dispel the mists, and find brilliant and triumphant issue. Mean-

while, she kept him unmolested in the chilling calm he had imperceptibly created.

At last, step by step, the conviction was formed, and Andria, who thought she had married an intellectual hero, found herself mated to a man secretly ashamed of the work by which his reputation had been won.

Where, she asked herself sadly, was the splendid intellectual communion to which she had looked forward when they were happy together by the sea at Portruthic? The passion that had flared in him for a moment was but the faint shadow of the love it had called forth in her.

Finally, when she fully realised the depth of his desire for complete moral, intellectual, and physical solitude, she sorrowfully acquiesced. On the other hand, she tacitly acquired complete control over the practical side of their common daily life. When they were first married she had consulted him. His answer came in monotonous indifference, 'Do as you like.' What there was of antagonism (the word is too definitely strong to describe the shadowy opposition between them) was purely passive, having an origin partly in the atrophied mental and physical virility of the man, partly in the secret disappointment of his wife. She now knew her life would never be as the lives of the women about her. The maternal longings, that had lain once as obscure hopes in the centre of her warm womanly heart, whispered their regrets from the dark shadows of her room on her wakeful nights. 'No one shall ever know,' she thought, and so she threw all her rich energies into the narrow world where her youth and beauty gave her sway.

Of the compensations of her position she was fully conscious. The breath and rumour of the many-sided London life rustled by her door. Why should she waste her rich youth in vain regrets when the world called to her in so many pleasant voices? Friends sprung up on all sides, exclusive doors were hospitably opened. In his dim way her husband witnessed her social success with satisfaction. In society he had lately acquired that peculiar sort of acrid interest which is based in contempt. The recluse sometimes stepped from his study into his own or his neighbour's drawing-rooms and looked on with the eye of cryptic malice. Society seemed to him a preposterously absurd institution, balanced on delicate but dangerous springs. If it were destroyed to-morrow, he believed the human race would be no loser. But in the good-natured, well-dressed mob which her husband despised Andria found not a little solace. Outwardly, at all events, it was sympathetic. Her husband's name and fame attracted the clever as well as the inquisitive, whilst her own beauty impressed men and women alike, and contrasted strangely with Otway's severely melancholy face.

Andria's receptions were popular, and filled her big rooms to overflowing. To be seen there suggested a creditable association with the world of art, letters, and cultured 'smartness' generally. Thither trooped the brave army of woman-writers when they could get cards or friends to bring them. Thither flocked, too, long-haired artist folk, friends of Andria's painting days, shepherded by Peter Bent, whose curious half-pitying, half-resentful eye, perceived the shadow that had fallen on his beautiful pupil. With Arthur

Vincent there occasionally came leading lights of the great amateur sporting world, correct, immaculate, stalwart, and of limited vocabulary. Conspicuous in this group shone Mr. Carter, carrying a wounded heart that neither Africa, nor game-preserves, nor the joys of gun, of horse, nor of wealth, could cure. Both he and Bent perceived that Mrs. Otway's happiness had obvious limitations.

'After all,' Carter reflected contemptuously, 'there is no reason why philosophy should promote domestic bliss. Otway's waterlogged with learning, you can see it in his face.'

Andria welcomed her old lovers as old friends, obliterating the distinction between them. It was pleasant to be loved with respectful uncomplaining diffidence, and she let Carter sigh his vague regrets in her ear without checking him with undue severity.

Thus outwardly content, Andria lived with her husband in a narrow circle through which the buoyant breezes of the world could not blow, and where love was slowly suffocated.

CHAPTER XV

As a hostess, Andria made rapid progress. Monotony is the ruling spirit of English gatherings. To remove this distressing blemish, she enticed to her drawing-room fragments detached from not a few different sets and coteries. One evening you might have seen within its ample walls a famous tragedian, a prominent politician who had quarrelled with his constituency, a minor Eastern envoy with a dark face and a red fez, an African explorer reported to have been eaten by a lion, but suspected of having himself sent this intelligence to the papers; a formidable group of dons in clerical waistcoats, an editor or two from Fleet Street, with fashionable proclivities, and a host of lesser lights with unrecognised claims to rank as vague 'celebrities.'

'Sprinkle your rooms with "big guns,"' said Arthur, 'and the little guns will spend an exciting evening in trying to spot them, and go away quite happy even if they haven't got within feeding distance of the refreshment table.'

Her brother had been called to the Bar, had chambers in the Inner Temple, and was understood to be devoting to his profession the time he could spare from his duties as a brilliant cricketer and a man about town. He had learnt at Oxford to take his sport seriously and his work lightly. Which, as

Otway had said, was an expensive method of avoiding pedantry.

Arthur was very useful at Andria's 'At Homes,' and made up for Otway's indifferent support. On this June evening, however, Andria, looking round, saw her husband moving from group to group with some animation in his eyes and step. She noted, too, with a faint revival of her ancient pride, that beside him most of the other men looked commonplace. She had been standing at the door receiving her guests; as she moved away she was stopped by an undaunted lady novelist whose books 'boomed' so vigorously in literary market that rival writers in despair were driven to attack her grammar.

'Your husband,' she exclaimed, 'looks like Dante in Rossetti's picture! I want to put him in a book. He will not object. Men never do. I have often done it before.'

'As a saint or a martyr, Miss Rooper?' Andria asked.

'As neither. As the spiritualised human type, and as a protest against the corrosive animalism of popular fiction. I may say I have the monopoly of the intellectual hero free from sex-bias. Will you introduce me to him? He did shake hands with me when I came in, but I'm sure he could not have known who I am.'

The spirit of mischief sometimes led Andria to set tiresome and self-complacent people on to her husband to worry him out of his sombre clouds. 'Discomfort,' he had once rashly written, 'may serve as a useful tonic. To learn to be bored resignedly is to acquiesce in the discipline of life.'

Remembering this and kindred aphorisms in *Science and Civilisation* as an excuse, she conducted Miss Rooper to her husband.

‘I want to present you to Miss Rooper,’ she said, ‘who proposes to immortalise you in a novel.’

‘Not immortalise,’ said Miss Rooper encouragingly, who suspected her genius awed strangers. ‘Mr. Otway has done more for himself than I can ever hope to.’

Otway respected second-rate novelists a little less than Carlyle, but concealed his feelings better. In his mind he was likening the crowd around him to a swarm of uncouth insects, trained to buss politely, or, when excited, to brandish clumsy *antennae* in vague expostulation. The flicker of amusement at each corner of his sad mouth resembled the faint smile of contempt which sometimes, when we persistently gaze, we find lurking half revealed on the lips of a saint on a medieval Italian canvas, and which seems to say, ‘Even my saintship is a grim joke.’

Miss Rooper saw his smile and thought he was pleased.

‘I’m unworthy of the honour, Miss Rooper. Why! my photograph has not even been placed in the windows with the princes, the actors, and the other popular persons.’

‘You must permit me to be the best judge, Mr. Otway,’ said the authoress. ‘Believe me, I fully understand the requirements of modern fiction.’

‘Critics tell me that it has made great strides since I was a boy and used to read Balzac and Thackeray and other obsolete writers.’

‘It *has* made strides,’ said Miss Rooper, who con-

sidered herself a 'lap' or two ahead of her most advanced rivals. 'We modern writers dig right down until we find the heart of a man, or, better still, of a woman.'

'Unless "mixed with cunning sparks of hell," hearts are rather paltry little organs to dissect,' said Otway.

'The artist,' said Miss Rooper, 'must exercise the right of selection. I am exercising mine when I choose you.'

'If it is not inconveniencing you too much, Miss Rooper, I should like to be "a lover who kills himself most gallantly for love."''

'You are the wrong type for that, Mr. Otway, far too cultured. The book is to be called *A Modern Alchemist*—alchemy here, you must know, means psychology. You, the hero, are a disappointed scholar who having tried all things has found delight is hollow, and who learns to love only when it is too late! But I wish you had read my books, then you would understand my methods of treatment. They are quite original. I'm afraid those ignorant and brutal critics have frightened you away. However, I will write to my publisher and request him to send you a complete set. Then if you can conscientiously say a kind word for them in print, in the *Athenæum* for instance, I shall be much obliged to you, although I despise log-rolling as the bane of literature.'

'Thank you, they will be a useful addition to my library, which is rather poor in modern fiction. When my own book is finished I will solace myself with yours.'

Soon after Otway escaped by introducing Miss

Rooper to Peter Bent, who involved himself in difficulties by declaring he had read all her books, and floundered a little wildly, to Andria's amusement, when the authoress eagerly desired to be informed which he liked best.

'Such,' said Andria to her old friend, later in the evening, 'are the dangers over which popularity trips.'

'But, Mrs. Otway, I was really not sure that I had never read Miss Rooper's books. The reviews and advertisements mislead one so.'

'Wasn't it rather the habit of saying polite things, Mr. Bent?'

'That may have suggested it unconsciously. But I heard Mr. Otway tell her that her books would be an addition to his library. How is his great work progressing?'

'I don't know,' she said rather sadly.

'She wouldn't have looked like that if she had married me,' thought the painter as he wished her good-night.

He and Carter left the house together. They agreed that Mrs. Otway was lovelier than ever, and shared a mean opinion of her husband.

'I believe Otway's written himself out,' said Bent.

'Then he has had a deuced short innings as a philosopher,' returned Carter.

CHAPTER XVI

'In the lives of most men and women,' wrote Otway, 'whose lives lift them above the dull level of human ruminants, a day of moral stock-taking comes when past joys and sorrows are weighed against future hopes and fears and a balance struck. How many are satisfied with the results of this arithmetic of human life the figures of which admit of no juggling? Does not the answer to this dreary sum too often show hopes disappointed, ambitions frustrated, health broken and faith lost?'

Four years after her marriage, and in the fulness of her beauty and the perfection of physical health, Andria echoed 'yes!' For moderate affluence, troops of amiable acquaintances, the sense of power which beauty brings could not compensate for the bleak disappointment of her married life. The whole fabric of the Otways' common existence was built on a sham foundation. To society it presented an appearance of refined dignity, but the winds whistled through the tenantless inner chambers where Andria's womanly cravings shivered in resentful loneliness. Sometimes through the frigid calm enshrouding her husband she saw signs of his struggle. Day after day he sat in his study grappling with the book that eluded his grasp. After the publication of *Science and Civilisa-*

tion, he had planned another work on the same philosophic lines, but the morbid transformation of his opinions blocked every cheerful avenue with an impassable barrier of the blackest pessimism. 'The truth, nothing but the truth,' thundered his bruised conscience when he essayed to evade his invading convictions. Sometimes he compared himself to the believer in orthodox Christianity who has grown convinced in spite of himself that his creed is an ingenious religious hypothesis founded on legend and folk-lore. He re-read the book on which his fame was founded and called himself an impostor. What should he do? Once he had accepted the defects of existing social conditions as subjective evidence of progress towards something nobler. Now he was persuaded that all organised societies wandered in vicious circles of slowly widening circumference towards inevitable destruction. The ultimate perfection of man seemed the foolish dream of a vain optimism since all human institutions contained the germs of their own death. The blind instincts shared by man with animals and which in all ages have animated 'the profane mob,' would, Otway thought, continually ruin the delicate structures built up by the feverish hope of humanity from the débris of earlier failures.

Thus in his bewildered brain social evolution appeared merely an endless journey over the same dreary ground, and man, an ephemeral insect on a slowly dying planet, saved only from despair by his eternal faculty of self-deception.

Partly from mental, partly from physical causes, he had become the victim of a torturing asceticism, which

finds in the gratification of the human appetites disappointment and degradation. The deeper the clouds encompassed him the closer he drew the mask over his face, but Andria dimly discerned the moral wreckage it concealed. But the vanity of the author was still strong within him. Whilst he helplessly wallowed in this sea of contradictory theories Otway yet clung to his literary reputation with something of the tenacity which compels a heart-broken widow to care for the texture and cut of her mourning robes. As for his marriage he no longer doubted that it was a mistake. The evidence of his own temperament and senses had proved it long ago. The skeleton stood between them waving them apart.

Once, returning unexpectedly from dining with a learned society, and passing through Andria's boudoir, which separated their sleeping-rooms, Otway found his wife in tears. The sofa cushions in which her head was plunged muffled her ears, and his step was light on the thick carpet. He touched her shoulder with his long narrow hands and she looked up in shame at her weakness.

'Are you ill?' he asked. 'I never saw you like this before.'

'No.'

'Then you must be unhappy.'

'No, I was a fool. That is all.'

And her self-contempt dried her tears.

'It is natural to weep. You and I by a different process have discovered what a pitiful failure it all is.'

'Do you remember,' she asked, 'what you wrote about "moral stock-taking"? Well, I am disap-

pointed at the result of mine. Perhaps you thought I was merely a dull human "ruminant."'

'No. I always appreciated your intelligence. Of course I knew you must be disappointed with your marriage.'

He spoke as though it were the inevitable law of life.

'Why did you ask me to marry you then?' she asked, looking hard into his eyes, to read his thoughts.

'Because I followed a human instinct now dead in me. I now know that I am incapable of feeling love as men understand it.'

They had never been so near so complete an explanation before.

Watching him as he stood in the lamp-light she imagined she saw a physical change corresponding to the abnormal mental one she divined.

'What has changed you?' she asked. 'Where is the author of *Science and Civilisation*. 'Tell me what has happened to him?'

'The poor wretch has found the truth,' he said. 'He knows that the whole race of men is drifting on a hopeless and shoreless sea; that society is despicable and base, and that those who flatter it as he once unwittingly flattered it are its worst enemies.'

'You reject all your earlier views, then?'

'Alas! yes,' he answered, 'and that is why I suffer. But, Andria, I do not wish to speak of this. Day and night I am thinking out the problem. When I have solved it I will give it to the world. I am convinced that all human societies are founded on man's

power of self-deception which he calls faith. When humanity once discovers this inevitable truth it will soon lose its fallacious ideals. Then slowly the civilised world will be crushed back to barbarism under the weight of its own materialistic cult. And so it seems to me that I alone in the world realise man's shameful destiny.'

The misery revealed on her husband's face made her own grief shrink to insignificance. She had never seen him so moved before. The discrepancy between his dominating folly and the pain it caused him added to her resentful pain. Whilst she looked at him in wonder suddenly he turned from her hastily, and entering his own room closed the door. Now she was convinced his brain was weakened by its years of toil. But on the following morning she found him perfectly recovered from the agitation excited by her own tears.

'I was a little excited yesterday,' he said, 'and probably said more than I intended. Please forget the scene. I am sorry to find you unhappy, because however reasonable a philosophic discontent may be, one hardly expects to find "sorrows and leaden-eyed despair" in one endowed with so sanguine a temperament as yourself. We must work out our own lives as best we can. I have never tried to limit the scope of yours.'

'You have always been kind,' said Andria.

And thus the explanation ended. But Andria was conscious of a change in him. Although the frigid calm settled down on him again, the amiable tolerance with which he had regarded the world before their marriage was gone. A cynical bitterness, which she

thought resembled Swift's loathing for mankind had taken its place.

The confused picture of this vacillating mental state pained yet fascinated her, for the flashes of his intellectual force often shone vividly in his conversation, so she sought the clue in *Science and Civilisation*, marking the following passage as of significant meaning: 'A personality is never arbitrarily fixed,' he wrote, 'but subject to modifications which are the slow result of the psychic forces impressing it, and which we call experiences. The changes, are, perhaps, analogous to the physical ones. Thus it is not inconceivable that the mind may grow grey in feeling as hair in colour. These processes, generally unseen by the individual undergoing them, are frequently apparent, as well as a cause of distress, to those nearest his affections. They represent, however, merely the rarer signs of cerebral growth or decay, and may result from the obsession of a single dominating idea. It is not to carry the analogy too far to argue that the mental thews and sinews of intellectual athletes may give way under a prolonged stress of cerebral activity, just as the muscles of the champions of the ring, the cinder-track and the oar may wear out under the strain of over-training.'

Thus in *Science and Civilisation* she found adumbrations of her husband's case. And although as the months passed by her affection waned, pity filled the vacant place.

CHAPTER XVII

If there were to be any colour in the texture of her life, Andria felt it must be thrown in by herself. She now knew that her husband had become the half-mechanical vehicle of the most soul-paralysing doctrines that ever sprang from the sick brain of man. But however much his pessimism might cloud his intellect it could not destroy his frigid kindness and sense of justice. His 'do as you like' was sincere. Thus the complete freedom claimed and accorded by each, lightened the burden of a yoke pressing chiefly on the wife.

When Andria spent a winter at Cannes with her mother, or Otway passed the spring in Rome, seeking chill consolatory whispers under the shadows of a ruined civilisation, their friends simply suspected that they did not 'get on,' but there was no scandal.

The extent and nature of Andria's disappointment could not make her completely unhappy. No one who is very strong and young can be. What Otway would have called the 'animalism' steps in to prevent it. 'When lust of life is strong,' he wrote, 'hope is indomitable. Even the rational despair learnt from the phenomena of nature dwindles to a dim regret whilst the vital energies are at their highest point.'

The energies of strength and youth came to Andria's rescue. The domestic cares lay lightly on her, as they do on a woman whose nursery is empty and whose means are sufficient. Her dream of refined intellectual companionship having proved a failure, she had no inclination to make a second attempt to climb the steep hill of culture. Her husband had shown her only the dull and depressing side of knowledge, and she was as convinced of the insufficiency of human wisdom to comfort humanity as the most orthodox curate. Under such circumstances it is merely a question of temperament whether a woman seeks consolation in religion or the excitements of the world. But to have been Otway's most ardent disciple had entailed a long journey beyond all creeds. Moreover Andria's powers of enjoyment were great, her interests many, and society full of vivid attractions.

As her experience of the world widened she discovered that her case was exceptional only in its nature, and that her marriage—her scarcely more than a nominal marriage—compared favourably with those of some other women.

One whom she knew was sick with jealousy; another shivered with dread whenever her frowning owner entered the room; a third was the loving drudge of an unfaithful task-master. The lives of none of the married women with whom she was intimate attained any dazzling degree of happiness. The domestic elements were rarely kindly mixed.

But yet when chance led her to some house where the nursery was full, and the children clustered round her in the unfathomable trust they feel for perfect

sympathy, Andria's heart sometimes sank under a sudden weight of aching regret.

Or again, perhaps a young matron, in the pompous satisfaction of early motherhood, and with that exasperating maternal superiority hateful to the soul of spinsterhood and the pride of the childless, spoke of the cares of bearing and rearing babies, of anxieties 'which you, Mrs. Otway, are fortunately spared,' then Andria, raging inwardly, occasionally retorted bitterly.

She had been rearing babies in her imagination all her life, and now she had a bicycle instead! Certainly the providential method of distributing children appeared somewhat open to criticism.

When a man whose whole attitude is one of secret but deep affection, is patient, respectful, and tactful, the woman who is its object ends in being touched as well as flattered, and in what Andria called her 'friendship' for Reginald Carter she found her chief consolation.

He had concealed his dislike for Otway so entirely that she had never suspected it. His most distinct aim in life was to see as much of the woman whom he insisted, against all reason, in loving, as was possible without raising a breath of scandal. His passion had sharpened the edge of his perceptions, and he more than half guessed the mystery of the Otways' married life.

Arthur Vincent, however, was the most important *trait d'union* between Carter and Andria. They had been friends at college, and their friendship had not decreased in the disuniting sea of London.

Arthur rode his friend's horses, shot his friend's

game, on occasions borrowed his friend's money. But whilst, under the weight of these obligations, his esteem for the man his sister had rejected increased, his feeling of indifference for the man she had married grew to one of tolerant contempt. There was melancholy satisfaction in his conviction that his original dislike to the marriage was right. With intimate friends like Peter Bent or Carter, he sometimes relieved his mind and roundly abused his brother-in-law and his philosophy.

One evening, when the friends dined together with Bent at his club, under the genial influence, Arthur Vincent liberated his mind on many things and spoke of Otway and the book 'which was a long time hatching.'

'When a man has become a mere bundle of theories,' he said, 'one has a right to expect something odd. Otway told me once that I couldn't be sure I wasn't the phantom of my own brain.'

'Did he? how curious!' said Carter, in the same tone as he would have said 'what rot!'

'It's a degree better than being a ghost in somebody else's brain, and much more respectable,' said Arthur.

'The distinction makes me giddy,' said Bent. 'But phantom or no phantom, I should like to paint your brother-in-law. There is a shadowy abstracted look in his face which would give a lot of distinction to a canvas.'

'I dare say a philosophic nightmare's all right in a picture,' said Arthur contemptuously, 'but it isn't at all attractive in a brother-in-law.'

'We all keep a private stud of nightmares,' said Carter.

'What's your stable like?' asked Arthur.

'I'm let off kindly because I'm eupeptic and destitute of imagination. But come on, let's go to the "Eldorado" and see the new ballet. I have a box.'

The hall-porter whistled up a hansom. The two big young men got in and the little painter perched himself between them, and in a few minutes they pulled up at the luminous centre where the popular Theatre of Varieties beacons the London night.

'Nettie St. George is in the bill to-night,' said Arthur, glancing at the programme, and settling himself like a big young man and a famous sportsman in the most comfortable seat in the house. 'I've never seen her.'

'She's pretty,' said Carter. 'D'you remember Leger-Leger of Brazenknob?'

'Yes; I fancy I do. An excitable little man, supposed to be well-off.'

'Leger's Patent Aeolian Cowl,' said Bent, who as the successor to an inventive sire knew these things.

'What's it for?' asked Arthur.

'To cure smoky chimneys.'

'Oh! but what about Leger, Carter?'

'Only that he has covered Miss St. George with diamonds.'

'I wonder he didn't marry her,' said Arthur, contemptuously. 'It would have been cheaper.'

'He couldn't, without committing bigamy.'

But a little later, when Miss St. George, in scarlet, capered across the stage, her neck, hands, and wrists blazing with Leger's jewels, Arthur

vividly felt there were excuses for the other young man's folly.

'She is a bacchante,' said the painter, 'and flickers about like a wicked flame.'

'For shame, Peter,' said Carter.

'What do you think of her, Vincent?'

'Leger isn't such an ass as I thought. I'll make him introduce me.'

CHAPTER XVIII

If Arthur had been as well acquainted with the published writings of his brother-in-law as his sister, he might have remembered, when he woke up next morning with the suspicions of a headache, that 'the fool thinks he is born to see his impulses gratified'; or that 'in the fabric of man's body consciousness is identified with his lusts,' and recalled other ethical storm signals ignored by those for whose guidance they have been intended since the days of Solomon. But, despising the wisdom of ancients and moderns alike, the sanguine youth made no effort to banish the picture of the red-flanked bacchante capering alluringly across his imagination.

Arthur, who lived with his fond mother, also had chambers in the Temple, where he shared a clerk with another young gentleman who wrote for the newspapers and dreamt of briefs.

'You are not looking well, Arthur dear,' said Mrs. Vincent at breakfast.

'I'm all right,' said Arthur, who disliked criticisms on his appearance after a late night.

On leaving the Eldorado and his friends he had taken a very unnecessary supper at a sporting club, popular with the London youth in the earlier stages of their career as men about town, when experience is limited, spirits high, and the digestion sound. Here

he had talked of Miss St. George, and heard little to her advantage, although what he did hear increased his desire to make her acquaintance.

'You must have been very late last night,' continued Mrs. Vincent, placidly spreading butter on her toast. 'I did not hear you come in.'

'Perhaps it was because you were asleep,' said her son. 'I dined with Peter Bent and Carter.'

'Andria spent the evening here.'

'Otway too?'

'No; he is quite absorbed in his work, Andria says.'

'How is she?'

'Very well indeed; but I wish she would not ride the bicycle.'

'Every one does now.'

'I don't think it is nice for a young married woman.'

'Otway doesn't object, I suppose?'

'Oh, dear no! He never objects to anything. Andria said you had not been to Bryton Street for a month.'

'The air of philosophy is too strong for me.'

'I'm sure Louis is always most kind, Arthur, and Andria likes having you there. She must find it a little dull sometimes.'

'I dare say. Otway at his best isn't an over-exciting companion,' said Arthur, finishing his tea, 'and for the last twelve months he hasn't even been up to his form.'

There was one side of the Otways' married life the Vincents forebore to discuss. When they approached it they stopped by a tacit understanding. Since Andria had an indulgent husband, who let her do exactly as she liked, and whose distinguished position reflected some honour on themselves, the Vincents accepted the

situation with that placid resignation neutralised by secret resentment with which we are wont to regard even the successful marriages of our dearest brothers and sisters.

That afternoon Arthur called on Andria, but saw Otway, who lived almost entirely in his study.

'Your sister is out, as usual,' he said in answer to Arthur's inquiry.

'Where has she gone?'

'I believe she is driving with your friend Carter.'

Arthur knew what this meant, and saw, in fancy, his sister driving Mr. Carter's splendid roans in the smartest of mail phaetons, whilst his friend sat beside her in the silent delight of temporary possession. The picture rather amused him.

'I fancy the Vincents require a good deal of amusement to keep them in good temper,' he answered.

But the idiosyncrasies of his wife's family did not interest Otway. Still he made a chill effort at hospitality.

'Will you stay and dine? I can't promise you it will not be dull, but a man must dine somewhere.'

But Arthur Vincent, who had no taste for 'slow' evenings, pleaded an engagement. 'Tell Andria I'll look in again soon,' he answered vaguely. 'But you're not very fit, are you? You're working too hard.'

'I'm quite well,' said Otway.

'Andria says you never take any exercise.'

'I walk across the park occasionally. A man only wants exercise when he has cultivated an unnatural taste for it. My training is the reverse of yours.'

'Thank goodness for that,' thought Arthur, as he left Otway to his great desk with its layers of pigeon-holes.

'Poor Andria,' he thought. 'One might as well expect to find a human emotion wrapped up in an algebraical formula as in Otway.'

Turning into Park Lane, bright with the April sunshine, and freshened by a warm shower, he passed his sister and his friend. Andria was intent on the horses, Carter intent on Andria. They passed without seeing him.

'Poor old Reggie has never got over it,' he said to himself, rather amused at such unreasoning fidelity. 'With any other girl the thing would be risky.'

A common form of family pride induced him to except his sister from the crowd of women who seek questionable compensation for unsatisfactory marriages.

But at best a man's sister is only his sister, and Arthur's thoughts soon reverted to their new and absorbing channel. What should he do? Miss St. George's slim twinkling ankles decided for him.

At the nearest telegraph station he sent a message to his mother to say that he was 'dining out,' and having proved the truth of his statement at his club, he took a front stall at the Eldorado, where only the orchestra intervened between him and the fascinations of the stage. He had never gone alone to a music-hall to see a girl dance before, or ever, to any considerable extent, made himself 'a fool about a woman.' But he was a distinguished 'Blue,' who deemed himself bound to conquer in love as well as in athletics, and what he mistook for knowledge of life gave him exactly the impulse required for a plunge in a dangerous direction.

He sat a little impatiently waiting for the ballet,

bored somewhat by the acrobats, the performing dogs, and the boisterous fat man who sang cheap jingo songs, in the garb of a blue-jacket, and unfurled the British flag in the face of Europe and of a warlike audience of cockney non-combatants. But when the jocund ballet music swung into the rhythm associated with his pervading emotion, his heart beat with hungry excitement.

Miss St. George was not a finished dancer. Her rivals swore emphatically that she 'hadn't the rudiments—took it up too late, you know—and was too conceited to learn.' More impartial critics, however, agreed that she was an exceedingly lithe young woman, with beautiful long graceful limbs, which she swung prettily and in perfect harmony with the stream of sound on which she seemed to drift.

There are, perhaps, more excuses for the puritanical attitude of resentment against half-naked *ballerine* than the worldly admit. Behind most British prejudices may be discovered fragments of rational opposition. This gives to so many of our insular disputes on moral questions the coating of sincerity which alien observers mistake for unmixed hypocrisy.

But Arthur was by nature and training disinclined to make a case of conscience of his inclinations, or to submit them to the analysis of an introspective impartiality. That evening he had not even eyes for the *première danseuse*, who had the stage to herself, and pirouetted like a well-balanced piece of terpsichorean clockwork on perpendicular toes. Whilst this distinguished performer was enjoying her rather prolonged innings, Arthur gazed fixedly at Miss St. George, standing gracefully at ease in front of the company of

robustly built young women whom she captained. She was staring about the house to see who was there. The seats on either side of Arthur were empty, dread of the big drum more than counteracting the attractions of proximity to the stage in other cases, and soon her big insolent blue eyes rested on him, and, to his delight, a meaning little smile flashed over the heads of the orchestra. Miss St. George was, just then, a little tired of all 'her old pals,' as she playfully called her more intimate acquaintances, and Arthur's splendid shoulders and handsome young head struck her fancy, so if he was vain enough to imagine that for the remainder of the ballet she danced 'at him,' there were excuses. A cold-blooded female observer, with no sympathy for 'nonsense,' might have considered without excess of exaggeration, that 'the dancing-girl leered at him disgracefully,' but Arthur thought her glances charming in their artless candour.

He had no intention of allowing the affair to rest here, and when the ballet, which closed the programme, was over, he turned to the stage door, determined to speak to her. To the same mysterious doorway a number of other youths had flocked, but he was relieved to find no familiar face amongst them. He thought them 'rather a weedy lot,' and annexed more than his due share of the narrow pavement to mark his disapproval. The policeman who, with an eye to the public morals, occasionally exclaimed 'Move on' to the throng, did not think it worth while to brush such formidable shoulders from his path.

The young ladies trooped out in twos and threes,

and the throng was thinning when Miss St. George, in a magnificent hat fresh from Paris and dressed in the giddiest heights of what a stage dressmaker conceived to be the mode, stepped from a dim passage into the blaze of the electric light. And so there met two reckless human atoms, coming from opposite social poles, with no rudder of caution to keep them to their befitting orbit.

Arthur with a stride was at her side. 'You will think me an awful ruffian for speaking to you, Miss St. George, but I shall be ill if I wait for a formal introduction, and "who knows, the world might end to-night."'

Miss St. George was not in the least surprised or annoyed. 'If,' she had said to herself, 'there's any good in that handsome boy he'll speak to me to-night.' However she thought it becoming to dissemble her satisfaction for form's sake.

'I don't think it is at all likely to end to-night,' she said, 'and I'm not accustomed to be spoken to like this at the stage door.'

'Of course, I know that. It's why I'm so ashamed. But my case is exceptional—very exceptional: Do let me get you a cab, and try to forgive me.'

'That's my brougham,' she said a little pompously, pointing to a small blue *coupé* waiting at the curb.

'Then let me see you safely in.'

'It isn't far,' she said, with a noisy laugh, 'and not dangerous.'

He opened the door, and she stepped in.

Then, hesitating a moment, he stood with his fingers on the handle looking into the dark carriage, waiting for a sign.

It came, and he stepped lightly in.

'Where to?'

'Home,' said a woman's voice with unnecessary stress on the aspirate. The brougham drove over the asphalt of the bye-street to the pavement of the great artery of traffic into which it debouched and took a westward course. From its open windows the policeman, who had watched the meeting with more interest than it deserved from a man of his experience, heard the sound of expostulation, of excuse, and of reckless laughter.

'She's got a new 'un to-night,' he said with a grin to a casual loafer of his acquaintance. Then he proceeded to 'move on' a group of ladies with brilliant complexions who were differing vehemently in opinion in a foreign tongue.

CHAPTER XIX

A young man of Arthur Vincent's careless habits, who lives at home with a fond mother, does not become intimately associated with a young woman in Miss St. George's position unless, sooner or later, the maternal misgivings, inevitably excited by mysterious absences from home and furtive telegrams, lead to a complete discovery.

A good many mothers who pride themselves on their knowledge of human nature pretend that they do not 'expect their sons to be better than other young men,' but they are never sincere. No woman, until she has had an ocular demonstration, believes her son capable of squandering his money and damaging his reputation on a 'worthless and immoral person.' This was the case with Mrs. Vincent.

Arthur displayed an ingenuity worthy of a better cause in keeping this side of his career from the knowledge of his family, seeing only inconvenience and humiliation in sharing the secret with them.

Possibly this 'unfortunate connection' would have been concealed from Andria and Mrs. Vincent if police court cases were not reported in the newspapers.

Having made Arthur's acquaintance and found how vastly she preferred him to the young gentleman who had 'set her up' in jewellery and furnished the 'bijou residence' at Fulham, Miss St. George promptly

quarrelled with the latter. There is nothing simpler than a quarrel of this nature. Angry expostulations lead to a vehement exchange of confidences. Miss St. George told Mr. Leger that she 'wasn't going to stand his impertinence and in her own house too.'

He reminded her that the house, so far as it belonged to her, was his gift. She retorted that he was 'no gentleman' for saying so. He replied that she was a mercenary wanton, and no judge of what constituted the conduct of a gentleman. She admitted that, in so far as she had tolerated him, this might be true, but that now she bitterly repented of this error of taste. To emphasise her disgust, she threw at him his immaculate tall hat, followed by a volley of abuse which much relieved her mind. Then Mr. Leger looked at her a moment as though he contemplated beating her, but before her 'you lay a finger on me if you dare,' wisely desisted, and picking up his ill-used hat, walked from the room, slamming the front door savagely to advertise the finality of his exit.

Miss St. George watched his departure with a sense of relief, for she was 'jolly sick of the little beast.' His lavish gifts, his unstinted generosity, she regarded as the right of 'an artiste worth fifteen quid a week at the halls.' For she expected to pick up lovers and diamonds much as a London sparrow hopes to pick up crumbs. 'There were plenty of other fellows ready to give *her* presents and pay *her* bills! At all events she could see dear Artie as much as she liked now, and was well rid of that ill-tempered little wretch.' So she flung herself at her newest lover with an ardour he found irresistible. No one but 'dear old Artie had ever understood her before.' She grew sentimental

over him, and when the exigencies of their lives parted them temporarily, managed to shed a quite sincere tear. The young man accepted the hint that his hat would not be out of place on the peg where Mr. Leger's had lately hung, only he was induced to believe that ornament had been removed by her orders long before the fateful evening on which they had met. So the hat, heedless of consequences, adorned the plush-curtained hall of Tulip Villa, West Brompton, with a polished air of semi-proprietorship.

'I can't think what Arthur is doing,' said Mrs. Vincent to Andria. 'He is nearly always out, and he does dislike one to ask him questions so. I heard he was at Brighton on Sunday with a lady.'

'I suppose he will be married some day,' suggested Andria as an explanation.

'I can't understand it, but I do hope it is all honourable,' said the uneasy mother. 'He has never been so mysterious in his movements before.'

Andria questioned Mr. Carter, but to no purpose. He supposed Arthur must be busy at his chambers. He was very popular and had heaps of friends. Besides it was May and the cricket matches were coming on.

Carter, who perfectly understood how his friend was spending his time, gave him the necessary hint.

'Your people guess what's up, Vincent. You had better look out. I have been putting your sister off with a whole string of excuses which she doesn't believe. That St. George girl isn't worth the fuss.' But Arthur, who thought strongly otherwise, was annoyed and suggested that it would be as well not to

interfere with him, and that 'if half the women one met in society were as honest as Nettie the public morals would not suffer.'

'A lot you care about public morals, Vincent,' said Carter. 'Look after your own. It's dashed bad form to worry one's people over these things.'

Arthur thought this was true, and, as a great stickler for 'form' was the more annoyed. In consequence he adopted the policy of the ostrich—a policy not unusual under such circumstances. In his case it assumed the simple form of 'getting out of the way and letting things slide.' So one morning, at breakfast he informed his mother that he was off 'on a cricket tour.'

'Then Thorpe had better pack your things at once, dear,' said she.

'That's done already,' said Arthur, shouldering his guiltiness into the recesses of his conscience.

Although Mrs. Vincent had a suspicion that it was early in the year for 'cricket tours,' which she had learnt to associate with August rather than with May, she yet hoped that the national game might 'remove him out of temptation,' and so refrained from obstructing his retreat by troublesome questions. When he had disappeared below their horizon, she and Andria began to study the records of the cricket reporters for his name, but unsuccessfully, until one day Andria found it—where she little expected it—in the police news.

The two ladies learnt, with a painful sense of shame and humiliation, that Mr. Arthur Vincent, of the Inner Temple, had been summoned before the Hammersmith Police Court by one John Wilkins, for

assault. The plaintiff, it transpired in evidence, a circus clown out of employment, had called 'on business' at Tulip Villa, Felix Grove, West Brompton, the residence of Mrs. Wilkins, professionally known as Miss Nettie St. George, who some time before had obtained a judicial separation from him. Wilkins, finding Mr. Vincent dining at the house, objected to his presence there. An altercation arose in consequence, which ended in his (Wilkins) being ejected from the room and knocked down the steps into the road. In defence it was urged that Mr. Vincent, as the guest of Miss St. George, interfered to protect her from the threatened violence of the intruder, who had come to extort money, and that no more force than was absolutely necessary had been employed. The evidence of two maid-servants, and of a cabman passing the door, fully bore out the defence, and the magistrate dismissed the case, after emphatically warning Wilkins that he had no right to interfere with the woman 'whom his cruelty had already compelled to seek the protection of the law.'

'What a horribly degrading thing!' exclaimed Andria with a white face.

'Perhaps it isn't so bad as we think,' said Mrs. Vincent shakily. 'He has always been such a good boy. He never gave me any trouble before. Thank goodness he cannot marry the wretched woman. You must consult with Louis and ask him what we had better do.'

Mother and daughter had put their loved idol on a spotless shrine. Now they discovered he was of that very human clay which mixes quite naturally with the mud.

CHAPTER XX

WHEN Arthur Vincent found his case reported he was nearly as much ashamed as his mother. For a journalistic friend had promised to keep it out of the papers, and Arthur, inexperienced in the ways of the press, had not expected to see his unlucky brawl advertised all over London in sensational posters. The opportunity of bracketing together the names of a 'distinguished athlete' and a more or less disreputable Music Hall dancer was not one which any self-respecting pressman could afford to miss, and the 'Fracas in Felix Grove'—'The athlete and the lady' flourished opulently in the baser newspapers as telling headlines.

Miss St. George, on her side, was proud of the part she had played. As an advertisement she considered the incident of distinct commercial value. When she appeared on the stage on the evening after the report was published, a round of applause greeted her. She felt like a heroine in an Adelphi drama, and tried to drop her eyes chastely on the stage in the approved style of harassed innocence in the presence of popular approval. Moreover it had given her real pleasure to see Arthur eject her husband from Tulip Villa. The damage done to her furniture—the tearing down of the plush curtain, the smashing of a valuable vase and a couple of chairs, the ruin of a barometer always at

'set fair'—was trifling when compared to the honours of the double victory. The conflict increased the warmth of her feeling for Arthur. 'Little Leger could have no more given that brute Bill the chuck-out than he could have flown!' she reflected with pride. She had always gone in fear of Bill Wilkins. When they had lived together, as they had off and on for three years, he had beaten her in his cups. Their Punch and Judy *ménage* had finally ended in the Divorce Court, what Miss St. George described as 'the beastly unfairness of the judge' limiting the nature of her conjugal relief to partial freedom. 'It's rough on me,' she had said to Leger, to Arthur, and to several of their predecessors, 'for I might marry any one!' But so long as Bill Wilkins lived, young gentlemen of amorous temperament were comparatively safe. Once she dreamt some one sent her a certificate of Bill's death, and she cried with disappointment to find it was only a dream.

On the evening of the 'fracas' as the halfpenny papers called it—thus raising it above the level of an ordinary brawl—she would probably have purchased Bill's departure if 'her boy Artie,' as she fondly called him, had not come to the rescue.

It was Sunday evening, the only evening on which she could 'dine at home with Artie' owing to her engagement at the Eldorado. There was an excellent dinner, 'lots of fizz,' and they were having a very good time when Bill's heavy hand pulled the bell.

Miss St. George sprang from her seat, her mouth full of lobster cutlet.

'O Artie! it's Bill. What shall I do?'

Arthur had heard of Bill, and felt a great distaste

for making his acquaintance, but his infatuation was at fever heat, and even Bill could not reduce his temperature to the normal point of reason.

'Tell the servant you won't see him,' said Arthur, at a loss for a policy.

Miss St. George's mouth twitched nervously.

'You don't know Bill,' she said.

'For goodness sake don't let him come to dinner.'

'Not me! You don't know me, neither. I'd stick the poultry carver in him first.'

'Say Miss St. George is out,' she said to the servant majestically, whilst Arthur bit his lips and frowned.

The message was conveyed to the ominous visitor and rejected with scorn.

'I don't want Miss St. George nor the Dragon neither, young woman. I've come ter call on Mrs. Wilkins, I 'ave. I saw that good lady through the lace curtains. Say 'er 'usband wants ter see her on important bis'ness.'

Then Mr. Wilkins walked into the drawing-room, which was opposite the dining-room, with the determined step of a man who considers himself at home.

'He always was an obstinate brute!' said Miss St. George, who, with Arthur, had overheard the conversation through the dining-room door, left ajar for the purpose. 'What shall I say to him?'

'Tell him you'll appeal to the courts for protection if he annoys you any more. He has no claims whatever against you,' said Arthur in his legal capacity, but intensely annoyed at the interruption of a little innocent festival to which they had both looked forward—perhaps because of the well-ordered domesticity it plagiarised so impudently.

'He'll want money,' said Miss St. George.

'Don't give him any. Put down your foot once for all. Leave the door open. If he bullies you I'll come in.'

So Miss St. George, in the lowest of low white satin dresses, bare bosom and arms, resplendent with Mr. Leger's diamonds, went rather nervously to confront her husband.

Mr. Wilkins, a thick-set, red-faced man, with a truculent eye and a dogged jaw, at that moment dispensing on the surrounding air a private atmosphere strongly impregnated with alcohol, was in that doubtful state of ebriety known even to puzzle experienced police surgeons.

'Well, missis, you don't seem overjoyed to see me,' he commended, 'but the truth is, I'm down on me luck, and pretty near stony-broke. When a man wants a little comfort, nat'rally he goes where he ought to find it, and that's in the bosom of his own fam'ly.'

Mr. Wilkins evidently enjoyed his speech, which he had prepared as he walked along the Fulham Road. As a clown he considered it becoming to give it a farcical basis.

'You have no right to come here or to interfere with me,' said Miss St. George, now too angry to be afraid; 'and I've made up my mind not to stand it.'

'O Mrs. Wilkins, I'm surprised to 'ear you say that! Surely you don't call a kind visit from me interferin'? Wasn't it "for better for worser, an' richer or poorer"? You're not the sort o' lady to deny your pore 'usband a little tenner! Look at them di'monds round your lovely bare neck. They almost

make yer look as though yer *did* 'ave some clothes on. But it's meant kind. I know it's meant kind! You expected pore old Bill an' put on yer best clothes to give him a welcome.'

Miss St. George was deeply annoyed that Arthur, to whom she had bragged of the extraordinary refinement of her taste, should hear this humiliating conversation.

'You are a nasty common brute,' she said a little shrilly, 'and a tipsy brute, too. The last time you bled me, I took my oath should be the last. I won't give you a penny. If you annoy me any more, I will appeal to the courts for protection.'

The last words did not quite seem her own. They prompted her husband's reply.

'May I arst if you keep a lawyer on the premises, Mrs. Wilkins?'

'You 've had my answer; if you don't go you shall be turned out.'

'What! a threat o' vi'lence? 'Ow unladylike! 'Ow unlike Mrs. Wilkins! Bill doesn't go without his tenner. He must 'ave it, pore chap! He's broke. And you earnin' your fifteen quid a week, too! Think it over, Mrs. Wilkins. I'm in no hurry. Ain't I at home in this elegant parlor?'

He sat down to prove it.

'If you don't go I will have you turned out,' repeated Miss St. George, now consumed with wrath.

'D'you keep a bully an' perfesh'nal chucker-out 'ere as well as a lawyer, Mrs. Wilkins? Call 'em all in, my dear! I'm ready for the bloomin' lot!'

Whilst Miss St. George was hesitating what to do, suddenly Wilkins placed himself between his wife

and the door and blocked her exit with his burly body.

'You don't leave till yer promise me that tenner, so I tell yer straight !' he said, suddenly dropping his air of jocular ferocity.

She tried to pass, but he blocked her way with his arm, and a chair was upset in the struggle.

'Help, Artie, help !'

The young man rushed into the room and stood between them.

'This is yer last fancy man, I s'pose, Mrs. Wilkins ? I should like to know what call he's got to interfere.'

'I heard all you said. Miss St. George will not give you a shilling. I'll take care of that. Now, go,' said Arthur savagely.

'Mind he don't hurt you, Artie,' said Miss St. George. 'I'll send for a policeman.'

But it was too late. The men had begun to tussle. Arthur with a quick and dexterous movement, learned in the football field, jerked his antagonist into the passage, and, before he could recover, sprang after him. In the narrow passage a fierce but brief struggle occurred. Wilkins was tough and active, but no match for the young athlete, who swung him the whole length of the passage, amidst the crash of breaking glass and falling furniture and the shrill voices of the cook and housemaid now watching the fray.

Following up his advantage, Arthur opened the door and shouldered his antagonist on to the steps, as he had often shouldered his way through many a 'Rugger' scrimmage at Oxford. On the threshold several blows were exchanged, vastly to the disad-

vantage of Wilkins, who finally was knocked clean down the six white steps into the May twilight.

Meanwhile other doors were opened, voices were raised; a woman at a window opposite shrieked 'Police ! they 're killing one another !' and a young sergeant, with a fat, rosy face, appeared hastily on the scene.

Wilkins insisted at the top of his voice that he had been turned out of his wife's own house by 'her fancy man.'

One eye was shut, and his nose cut, and all the ruffian in him had come to the surface.

The policeman, contrasting the late combatants, decided right doubtless lay on the side of Arthur. After an unseemly wrangle, the sergeant induced Wilkins to depart on the plea that the only way of obtaining justice was by means of a summons at the Hammersmith Police Court. Arthur's address at the Temple was laboriously inscribed in the policeman's fat notebook with a blunt pencil, and Miss St. George and her champion (who felt thoroughly ashamed of himself) were left at last to finish the repast that had been so violently interrupted.

CHAPTER XXI

BUT when Arthur read with dismay on the poster of the fourth edition of a halfpenny evening paper the following lines:

‘FRACAS IN FELIX PLACE’

‘THE ATHLETE AND THE LADY’

mortification half choked him. The copy he bought doubled his horror. First there was a portrait of ‘Miss St. George in Court,’ capable of identification only because of its label; then a description of himself and his achievements. ‘The well-known ‘Varsity athlete,’ wrote the reporter, ‘evidently uses his “mauleys” as cleverly as he handles the willow. The plaintiff was adorned with a beautiful black eye, and wore sticking-plaster across his nose.’ Next the unhappy youth recoiled before such graphic headlines as these:—

‘KNOCKED DOWN THE STEPS’

‘ASKED IF HE WANTED ANY MORE’

‘NETTIE’S BRAVE DEFENDER’

‘NONE BUT THE BRAVE, ETC.’

He pictured his mother and Andria reading this horrible stuff with an angry shudder.

What was to be done? Arthur shut himself up in his chambers in sulky resentment till the next day, when a telegram from Miss St. George called him forth.

He found her lunching with an excellent appetite, very much delighted with the part she had played.

'You should have seen what a reception the boys gave me last night,' she said. 'I've a good mind to ask for a rise: they get me too cheap. I had two big bouquets. And to think I owe it all to you, Artie.'

'It's a little awkward they have stuck it all in the papers,' said Arthur.

'Why! that's the best of it. We've had a splendid show. I've read all I could get. But that was a beastly portrait of me. Quite libellous, all the girls said so. You come out fine.'

'In what line—as a bruiser or a "chucker-out"? What do you think my friends will say?'

'If they've any sense they'll be proud. One of the papers said we made a "beautiful pair," which is quite true.'

But he decided he mustn't let her know he was not ashamed of sitting by her in the same pillory.

'Hang the newspapers! Hodson, who is a newspaper man, gave me half a promise our names should be kept out.'

'You might as well try to keep mine out of 'em as Mr. Gladstone's or Henry Irving's,' she said proudly. 'Besides you're a bit of a celebrity yourself.' And Miss St. George, who was wearing an innocent pink cotton frock with shoes and stockings to match, tossed

off the remainder of her bottled stout with an air of perfect contentment.

'Any one would think Bill had given you a licking instead of taking one,' said she when she had recovered her breath. 'You behaved splendidly. As to not like being written about in the papers, why, if you were in them as much as me you couldn't do without it. It will be all forgotten the day after to-morrow, that's the worst of it. Ev'ry one's forgot my case against Bill. A girl at the Eldorado actually asked me whether it was me divorced Bill or him me. People have such awful bad mem'ries!'

Miss St. George, having now finished her luncheon, lighted a cigarette and proceeded to tell Arthur why she particularly wanted him.

'I've just been served with a beastly writ thing from Pounder, the livery stable man. I had a row with him because he sent me a dirty brougham, and left him. *He* said without paying the bill. I've my doubts about that. At any rate he's been dunning me here and at the stage door for the last nine months. Fin'ily he county courted me and got a judgment. If I don't pay up there'll be ructions—real ones this time. The worst of it is I've just paid my dressmaker and am stony-broke. I don't like comin' to you, Artie, because you're a dear, good boy, and I know you're not over flush! But some one must pay, that's the long and short of it, and there isn't any one else—at least just now—as I can ask.'

'I haven't the money. I shan't get any till next June, when my executors pay up.'

'Then look here, Artie. Just "spout" some o'

these di'monds. Perhaps you wouldn't mind taking them to Dobell's. He's had 'em once or twice before.'

'I'll get you the money, Nettie,' he said, for though his infatuation since its refrigeration in the police court and press had slightly cooled, it still ran high. 'Give me the writ. I'll see the business properly settled.'

'Thought you said you was broke too?' she said.

'I'll borrow the money.'

He was standing rather disconsolately with his back against the sideboard, but pleased at this proof of her power over a young man whom she liked too much to desire to fleece, she sprang to her feet, and flinging her cigarette into the remaining froth in her glass, raised herself on tiptoe and kissed the hot blood into his face.

'I could kiss your handsome face till there's nothing left. It's like a dear hard sort o' lovely fruit, Artie! I wish I'd married a feller like you. I could have kept straight then!'

'But I say, Nettie,' he said, seizing his opportunity, 'don't you think it's silly to be so extravagant. You haven't a notion of the value of money. Fifteen pounds a week is seven hundred and sixty a year.'

'Fifteen quid a week's a flea bite, Artie. And look here, don't you "rag" me about being extravagant, because I won't stand it. You're like the rest of 'em. Do you expect me to 'ave a Post Office Saving Bank's book like the servants?'

'I don't see why you shouldn't.'

'Because it's too common, and would make me sick.'

'All right, we won't argue about it. I must go and settle your business. I'll meet you outside the stage door as usual.'

Then after a farewell of excessive warmth which made his hair rather rough, Arthur hurried down Felix Grove, passed the little regiment of art pottery that graced the window ledges, and bore testimony to the 'culture' of the residents, into the Fulham Road, where he picked up a hansom and drove to his chambers in a very mixed state of mind. He wanted Nettie, and desired the aureole of 'good form.' Just then the two were incompatible. In Piccadilly he passed his sister's victoria. She was alone, and on her way, he guessed, to his mother's.

He tilted his hat over his eyes and hoped she did not see him.

Then he imagined he could hear his friends talking about him, and wondering why 'Vincent was making such a fool of himself!' At Oxford his case would appear as an excellent joke. How the men would enjoy it. A scandal associated with the name of a distinguished 'Blue,' even after he has 'gone down' was, he knew, peculiarly attractive to the undergraduate mind.

But although his senses called him back to Nettie as soon as he was out of her sight in most commanding tones, yet whilst he obeyed he was painfully conscious of the weakness.

'What a muddle! What a muddle!' Yet he was forced to admit that it was one from which he had neither the will nor the desire to escape. Nettie in her crimson excuse for clothing barred the way.

But far the worst part of the business was the

advertisement the papers had given his folly. He half fancied the people in the street knew of it and grinned at him as he went by. An intrigue which ought to have been thrust away in the dark places where illicit love hides its lustful head had been flung into the full glare of the limelight !

‘What luck ! What confounded luck !’

He knew dozens of men ten times worse than himself—one or two were even married—but no one—that is to say, no one who mattered—ever found *them* out !

Thus, without the shadow of repentance, but resenting the sordid but inevitable debt to be paid, Arthur Vincent mounted the stairs to his chambers. The clerk, a small boy in a very shiny black coat, gave him Otway’s card, and said :

‘The gentleman called just after you left, sir. He wishes particularly to see you.’

On it was written : ‘Come this evening if you can.’

‘Hang Otway !’ he said. ‘They might have left him out.’

A few minutes later Peter Bent was shown into his room. Arthur was glad to see him. At all events he would take a broad view of it.

‘A nice mess you have made of it, young man,’ said the painter, in cheerful amusement.

‘Did you ever see such luck ?’ grumbled Arthur. ‘I feel like a man who’s being pelted with rotten eggs. What is everybody saying ? I’ve been lying low.’

‘The usual thing : who’ve seen Nettie dance find ninety-nine excuses for one moral reason ; the “unco guid”—the majority always—can’t see the excuses.’

‘But have you seen my people, Peter ?’

‘That’s why I’m here. Your mother wrote to me.’

“‘As an old and esteemed friend of the family’—
eh? I know that letter.’

Bent nodded.

‘Yes, and begged me to help “her unfortunate boy out of trouble into which evil companions had led him.”’

‘Damn it, Peter. Don’t hit me with both ends of the whip at once.’

‘It’s for your good. Every one pays for his whistle. Even Master Arthur Vincent isn’t exempt.’

‘Well, what did you do?’

‘I went like a true diplomatist to your mother’s and politely suggested that the best way was to make as little fuss as possible.’

‘How reasonable! How was she?’

‘Perturbed by the newspapers, poor lady! “What right have we,” I asked, “to put the worst construction on this unfortunate affair?” “Of course,” she said, “I don’t expect my boy to be better than other young men——”’

‘She’s right there; but she does, all the same,’ interrupted Arthur.

‘If I had a son, so should I,’ answered Bent impartially.

‘You’re a brick, Peter, to take my part; but what else? Go on.’

‘Well it comes to this. You need only return to the paths of rectitude, and all will be forgiven. In its heart I’m convinced the world prefers the prodigal. Husks are quite good enough for the virtuous.’

‘Quite right too! Virtue fattens on anything. But no human pie in the corner for me, please, Peter!’

'There will be no pie. Your mother intends saying nothing whatever about it. I have persuaded her to take the highest view of your conduct. I assured her Miss St. George might well be a young lady of the most irreproachable morals. "It is true," I urged, "she contracted an unfortunate marriage when quite young. But we ought to pity her for that."'

'Magnanimous Peter! so we ought, really.'

'Well, this mightily relieved your mother. "At all events, he can't marry the woman," she said. You ought to be grateful for that too! Go home and eat of the fatted calf as though nothing had happened.'

'Not to-night, Peter, thank you.'

'Why not? Anything better to do?'

'Yes.'

'The young lady?'

'Yes.'

'Arthur! You ask too much of the gods.'

'Perhaps. But come and sup with us.'

'Don't tempt a philanthropist. Where?'

'The Savoy, and blow the expense.'

'In that case, yes.'

'Mind you cover me with a veil of decency, Peter!'

'I'll try. But it isn't easy to make it thick enough.'

'The deuce! There's some one on the stairs.'

But the footsteps belonged to Reggy Carter, who entered, looking heated.

'I've spotted you at last, Vincent. Been hunting you all over the place.'

'O Lord!' exclaimed Arthur. 'Another lecture,

I suppose. Who sent you? My sister, I'll swear. Peter's my mother's envoy.'

'Mrs. Otway's in an awful way about you, I can tell you.'

'I'm very sorry, Carter, but——'

'You ought to be. I promised to find out for her where you were.'

'Well, here I am, innocently waiting for briefs, as usual.'

'What about the cricket tour in May?'

'A now useless fiction, alas! The dashed papers exploded that.'

'Vincent, I wish that other fellow had given you a good hiding.'

'Well, he did try. The ha'penny papers gave him his revenge, if he only knew it.'

'You deserve one at all events. If I were a stone heavier, I'd do it myself.'

'I'd take it standing like a man. But instead of trying, have supper with Bent and me at the Savoy.'

'Who else is this helot taking, Peter?'

'The lady, of course.'

'In that case, yes, since Bent will give the party a respectable air. You'll be taken for Miss St. George's papa, Peter. Look here, Vincent, I'll go and tell your sister I found you "busy in chambers." That sounds well, at all events. Come on, Bent, and leave him to his pangs of conscience. We meet at the Savoy.'

'No, you stay a minute, Carter. I want to speak to you alone. Peter won't mind. It isn't a secret, but a favour.'

'All right: I'll escape,' said Bent. 'I'm always

afraid when I hear the word "favour." I'll meet you at the supper.'

Then Bent sedately departed.

'There's a dangerous amount of human nature in that young fellow,' he reflected. 'It's one of the advantages of a university education. He never had to learn to repress it in early youth, as I did.'

When the young men were alone, Arthur came to the point at once.

'Well?' said Carter, half guessing the nature of the request.

'Lend me fifty pounds like a good fellow. I'll repay you on the 21st of June.'

"You're going it, young Copperfield," quoted his friend.

'If you don't let me have it, I'll get it somewhere else,' said Arthur bluntly.

'I know that, even if you pay twenty-five per cent. for it, so I'll post you a cheque to-morrow morning.'

'It's awfully kind of you, especially as you think I'm making an ass of myself. But, Carter, you've no idea what that girl is to me.'

'Of course not. No one ever has. But for goodness sake don't "plunge" over her as Leger did. It didn't hurt him, but it will smash you. He gives her an awful character!'

'Trust me. I'll teach her economy if any one can.'

'I'm sure of that. You've cheek enough for anything. But so long as you don't worry your people it doesn't much matter what you do.'

'Look here, Carter, I'll square it with them to-morrow.'

'That's a promise. Whatever else you break, Vin-

cent, you never break that. Good-bye. I'll see you at supper with your Helen up-to-date.'

When he was alone Arthur filled a briar-root pipe and tried to make up his mind what to do. When he had smoked it out, he had decided that the only course was to 'bluff the business out,' and having arrived at the decision most in harmony with his tastes he arrayed himself with extreme care in his dress clothes and proceeded to the Eldorado, where he was regarded as a sort of fixture.

CHAPTER XXII

ANDRIA rarely asked her husband's advice on any question now, and had never consulted him concerning her own family. Absorbed in speculating how many centuries would elapse before the present form of civilisation perished from what he called 'moral pyamea,' the conduct of individuals had little interest in his eyes. However, as an honest pessimist should, he did glance through the police reports of *The Times*, invariably finding there evidences of that 'evil in the mass,' which, in his own words, had 'arrested and would arrest all true human and moral progress.' He was not, therefore, taken by surprise on the sunny afternoon when Andria, with a troubled face, hurried into his study, with five or six newspaper reports of her brother's appearance at the Hammersmith Police Court in her hand.

'I see,' he said calmly, 'that you have read it.'

'You knew, Louis, and never told me!'

'There was no particular reason why you should see it. Your brother cannot wish it. The affair is neither interesting nor edifying.'

Andria was hurt and angry. Nothing seemed capable of stirring this melancholy dreamer.

'I have just come back from my mother's,' she said, curbing her anger. 'She is very much upset.'

'I am sorry. Mothers always are at these things, but unreasonably.'

'You cannot understand. We were so proud of Arthur. It is dreadfully humiliating to see his name in such odious associations. Some of these reports turn it all into an abominable joke.'

She handed him the bundle of papers, and then sat down in the big leathern arm-chair where once Dr. Otway's patients had crouched nervously awaiting his diagnosis, and watched her husband's face as he looked contemptuously through them.

'Your brother has afforded newspaper readers a quarter of an hour's genuine amusement,' he said. 'I really think the baser sort of journal one of the worst evils of sham progress. When one compares what was expected from the liberty of the press with its results, its freedom seems a very mixed blessing.'

Andria had often found her husband's habit of drawing general conclusions from individual cases trying, but never so exasperating before.

'But what is to be done?' she asked.

'The Press will work its own sweet will, I imagine,' he said, 'unless the State, alarmed at this influence for evil, undertake the diffusion of news itself.'

'But I was referring to Arthur, not the newspapers.'

'Oh, nothing, what can be done?'

'My mother thought that you might suggest something,' Andria replied in a voice that inferred it was an opinion she did not share.

Years of thought had long ago smothered inclination to act in Otway. He was so accustomed to be baffled by moral difficulties—in his mind the only important ones—that he had almost forgotten how to

meet the actual troubles of everyday life. In fact he always saw so many reasons against adopting any particular course that his attitude in dealing with them was one of apathetic hesitancy.

He had shown a striking example of this morbid inactivity accompanied by extreme intellectual unrest, by oscillating for five years before the book he was afraid to write. His philosophic trail was marked by untiring industry in the pigeon-holes of the late Dr. Otway's writing-desk, and the accumulation of indexed note-books.

'The only plan that suggests itself to my mind is not to interfere,' he said after thinking a minute. 'What would you propose?'

'He must be told how wrong, how criminal it is to sacrifice the best side of his nature, perhaps his career, on a worthless woman,' exclaimed Andria. 'Surely you must see this?'

'It is a rule of life,' he answered calmly, 'that a man must find his own remedy for his own folly.'

But she was in no mood for 'rules of life.' They might be applicable to the rest of the world but not to Arthur.

'But we don't even know where he is, or what he is doing,' she said, ignoring her husband's cheap wisdom.

'The dancing woman's address is given in the papers,' he replied drily.

'We have no right to think he is there.'

'The theory of probabilities rather points to it. If you wish it I will accept the other hypothesis. You said, I think, that he had gone on a cricket tour.'

'Yes, but it wasn't true.'

'The cricket tour was the usual excuse. Your brother evidently intended it as a signal to his friends that they were not to meddle with him, for he could scarcely have expected them to believe it.'

'Do you really think we ought not to interfere?'

'It is questionable. You and your mother naturally take the traditional view of his conduct, but it is well you should understand that there is a side of his life to which he expects you to be blind. For a year or two, if I may judge by his temperament, it is the one he will find most important and absorbing.'

'I can't take your cold-blooded view,' said Andria with suppressed irritability. 'It does not seem to me a case for philosophy. Something must be done to rescue him.'

'What you regard as a rescue he would consider a raid on his freedom. There is nothing abnormal about this affair. Your agitation is entirely out of proportion to its importance. Your brother's case only differs from the ordinary low amour—forgive the unpicturesque terms—in so far as he has failed to conceal it from the ladies of his family. But it is reasonable to take such incidents in a young man's career for granted.'

'I can't believe that the world is so depraved as you suggest,' she said, benumbed under the chill of his lifeless logic.

'Obedience to the lower instincts is, I think, common in young men,' he said. 'But because morality insists that this obedience to appetite is wrong, society affects to believe that it is unusual. In these matters, the respectable instead of the ideal is worshipped. The whole thing is an ingeniously engined conspiracy

on the part of society to persuade itself of its own righteousness. Some day, I suppose, we shall pay the price for stifling truth.'

And so (wandering from the practical to the abstract) for a quarter of an hour, he mused, in vague ethical terms, on the problem suggested by Arthur's delinquencies, spreading the mists of his own mind round hers.

'It seems to me that you turn from realities to study shadows,' she said at last.

And as he was still persuaded that she ranked him among the intellectual elect, her criticism wounded him. It jarred on his melancholy self-complacency the more because he faintly suspected it contained the germs of truth.

'Perhaps,' he replied with restrained asperity, 'that is because you do not quite understand my method.'

'I dare say that is so,' she answered, 'but I am worried, and have no taste for the application of general principles to individual cases. We are discussing this painful business from different points. However you do see excuses for Arthur's conduct.'

'Little else but excuses. You would too if you had learnt to generalise instead of individualising. What percentage of young men, do you imagine, resist this sort of temptation?'

'I expected Arthur to resist.'

'I did not.'

'Why?' 'Because the fool thinks he is born to see his impulses gratified''?' she replied, quoting from his book.

Once the swiftness of this reference would have pleased him, but that was long ago.

'Yes,' he replied, as his mind swept back to the passage. 'But I think I showed this form of folly to be inevitable since "man's consciousness is identified with his lusts." This axiom of life is only unrecognised because the theologians have driven a wedge between my predicate and its complement.'

'Do you think individual conduct of no importance then?'

'Only so far as it is part of the vast complex human problem.'

Andria made a slight movement of impatience, which he perceived.

'But stay,' he added more promptly than usual. 'From your point of view your brother's danger is not great. He cannot crown his folly by marrying the woman. Your mother must have found comfort in this.'

Andria did not tell him how much, but looked at him steadily, and he knew she desired him to act.

'I will call at your brother's chambers at the Temple. I might learn what he is doing. You could not well go there under the circumstances.'

'Thank you, Louis. I wish you would.'

Then he proceeded to carefully lock up his papers, lest, as she imagined, she should read them. They both walked into the hall.

'You think I cannot understand Arthur,' she said, whilst he fumbled in a drawer for his gloves.

'Not in the least.'

Then she remembered that people said they were alike, and knew they were right. Taking her own unit of moral measure she wondered how one so full of youth, strength, energy, and life's sunshine

could lack force to bend the baser impulses to his will.

‘Perhaps men and women never understand one another,’ she said.

‘The sex barrier is difficult to climb over,’ he answered with the air of a man who had successfully accomplished the feat, which she noted with a flicker of amusement.

Then Otway opened the door, and walked slowly into the sunny street, his tall slight figure throwing a wavering shadow on the warm pavement.

‘He is smothered under the weight of his “general principles,”’ she thought, ‘and will do no good.’

Andria was learning to hate philosophy, and, although ashamed to confess it, to despise the philosopher.

In her perplexity her thoughts turned to the only friend capable of helping her—to Reginald Carter, who had performed a hundred kind offices for her brother.

‘At least,’ she told herself, ‘he is a man.’ She knew he was generally at his club at that hour. Why not ask him to help?

On her writing-table lay the telegraph form ready. ‘Please call to-day,’ she wrote; ‘I want your advice.’

And having despatched it she sat in the drawing-room to await his arrival.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE result of Reginald Carter's visit to Andria was his prompt appearance at Arthur's chambers.

When he read her telegram in the hall of his club he guessed why Andria wanted to see him and was delighted that she should appeal to him. 'The Vincents,' he thought, 'were just the people to make a fuss about this sort of thing.'

The distance, in a fast hansom, between Pall Mall and Bryton Street is short, and a quarter of an hour after receiving her despatch Reginald Carter was in Andria's drawing-room.

'I see you know why I telegraphed to you,' she said, evidently, as he perceived with pleasure, accepting her own act as perfectly natural.

'I thought it might be about Arthur,' he answered.

'Of course you have seen about him in the papers.'

'Yes,' he said sympathetically, 'such publicity is a little unfortunate, especially for one's people.'

'I think it a most painful scandal. This Miss St. George seems quite a notorious person?'

'She is rather well known on the music hall stage.'

'Now, Mr. Carter, I want to ask your advice, for I am sure you will help all you can. What must we do to free Arthur from this most unfortunate—' here she paused for a euphemism and lighted on 'entanglement.'

To attempt to 'disentangle' a man who is enjoying the coils against his will did not strike Carter as a simple enterprise, or one to be undertaken with a light heart. His face showed his doubts and she perceived his hesitation.

'I hope,' she said, 'you don't think, as Mr. Otway does, that Arthur's friends ought to leave him to himself and pretend to be blind to the scandal.'

Carter was curious to know how the philosophic spirit, for which, as exemplified in Mr. Otway, he felt a jealous contempt, proposed to deal with the affair.

'Of course Mr. Otway has far more experience and knowledge of the world than I have,' Carter replied, who, however, held the opposite opinion, 'and I should like to know what he thinks.'

'He was inclined to consider Arthur's—a—trouble,' said Andria, seizing dexterously on a fresh synonym, 'a little over elaborately. He seems to think we ought not to interfere.'

Although Otway's advice coincided with his own opinion he decided to take the view which, he perceived, Andria wanted.

'I can't agree with Mr. Otway,' he answered. 'I think *we* ought to do all we can to—' he was on the point of saying 'keep Arthur out of this woman's clutches,' but changed the phrase virtuously to 'help Arthur to do what is right.'

And Andria was pleased and relieved.

'I knew,' she exclaimed, 'that you would think that. Tell me what you would advise.'

'Well it won't do to make it too hard for him,' he said. 'After all we're all human!'

He felt rather sorry for this over-hasty admission

which resulted from a sudden and complete lapse into candour.

'Of course, of course, Mr. Carter,' she replied hastily, 'but I can see no excuse for such—' here she sought another euphemism and found 'infatuation.'

'How should you?' he exclaimed, in the voice of one sharing her limitations of vision which, as his own weakness was a distinct variant of the human passion, was partly true. 'I mean,' he explained, 'that it would be a mistake of any of us to ask him questions, or scold him, or moralise in any way, or generally to set his back up. For he is a bit obstinate, you know. A man knows very well when he's not up to form in these things. That's punishment enough for a good fellow like Arthur.'

But Andria was not persuaded that the weight of tacit displeasure quite met the exigencies of the case.

'You mean,' she said, 'that we ought to pretend not to know anything about it. That is what my husband thinks.'

But Carter was determined to have an opinion diametrically opposed to Mr. Otway's. Three-fifths of human opinions have probably no nobler origin than the spirit of contradiction.

'No; not exactly that,' he said, 'but there are ways of reproving a poor sinner who's in a scrape without exactly sticking him in a corner, you know.'

'You are recommending the fatted-calf treatment. Do you consider that severe enough, Mr. Carter?'

'Yes, quite. That sort of veal always gives a good honest sinner indigestion. But I'll see Arthur this evening, Mrs. Otway. He'll stand more from me

than from most men—and find out what—well—what it all means. I dare say,’ he declared in the teeth of his convictions, ‘that it isn’t half so bad as it looks.’

Then he rose to go.

‘But I want him to go home, Mr. Carter. My mother is worrying herself painfully.’

‘It’s a shame that she should be worried, or you either. I will give Master Arthur a piece of my mind. I’ll find him this evening and tell you all about it to-morrow.’

‘Come to luncheon. You are very kind to take so much trouble. I’m very sorry to trouble you, and very grateful.’

He had shaken hands, and was on his way to the door when he suddenly stopped and turned towards her.

‘I would do anything on earth for you, Mrs. Otway,’ he said with deep feeling in his eyes and voice,—‘and Arthur,’ he added as though to legitimate the warmth of his words. ‘I shall be delighted to lunch here to-morrow. We might go for a drive afterwards in the phaeton. I am trying a new pair. I want your opinion about them. Good-bye. Don’t worry about Arthur. It will be all right.’

As he stood a moment on the door-step he saw Otway returning, his eyes bent on the ground trailing his umbrella along the pavement like a stiff tail. To avoid him Carter turned in the direction of Park Lane, and felt the west wind brush his face with the odour of the lilac blossoms.

CHAPTER XXIV

On the following morning Carter walked slowly and thoughtfully from his chambers in Piccadilly to Bryton Street, timing his arrival there for one-forty. The Otways' luncheon hour was two. This, he calculated, would give him exactly twenty minutes conversation with Andria before Otway arrived on the scene. A rather close study of the philosopher's movements, extending over two years, enabled him to forecast them with general accuracy. He knew what scientific meetings Otway was likely to attend, and their dates, quite as well as he remembered the leading racing and sporting fixtures. To-day the chances were greatly in favour of Otway's lunching at home, and Carter rather unreasonably resented the prospect.

Andria was sitting in the drawing-room by an open window, converted into a miniature garden of spring flowers. Their fresh scent stole into the room on the quiet air, and their colour brightened and broke the formal severity of the street. Beyond, the trees of the Park were visible; overhead, a space of soft white cloud in a blue sky where, for once, the spring had mixed the elements and suppressed the metallic harshness too often March's legacy to May.

'Arthur is going home to-night,' Carter said in reply to her glance of inquiry.

Andria looked relieved. 'Tell me all about it, please.'

'Well, there isn't much to tell,' he answered evasively. 'Arthur seemed annoyed that you should put the worst construction on it. It isn't so bad as you imagine.'

Andria reflected a moment, failed to see the redeeming features, but perceived that Carter had no intention of telling her what he really knew.

'It was,' she thought, 'the usual conspiracy of silence by which men agree to hide their worst sides from women.' Her experience seemed to be widening painfully and rapidly.

She received his information in silence.

'Of course,' he said after a pause, 'you will say nothing to your brother.'

'No, nothing. I will not even ask him what his batting average is.'

'That will be charitable of you,' said Carter.

'Charitable in proportion to the temptation?'

'Yes, exactly.'

Then the futility of the excuse appearing in its absurd mendacity, Carter laughed quietly to himself.

'You seem amused, Mr. Carter.'

'Not much,' he said, smothering his smile, and diving into his mind for a thread to drag the topic to a more agreeable plane of conversation.

'Now this is all settled,' he said with vague application of the demonstrative pronoun, 'I hope you and your mother won't bother any more about it.'

But Otway's entrance rendered an answer unnecessary.

His pale cheeks had two spots of colour, and his eyes were brighter than usual.

‘Mr. Carter lunches with us,’ explained Andria.

‘How d’you do?’ said Carter. ‘I hope you’ve had a good morning’s work, Mr. Otway.’

‘Better than usual, I think,’ said the philosopher, ‘better than usual.’

‘That’s satisfactory,’ exclaimed Carter, with a courageous effort to attain the right ring of sympathetic approbation. ‘I’m not much of a literary man myself, in fact I never think, something does that for me. Still if there is any analogy between shooting and philosophy, I can understand the pleasure a thinker feels when he brings down a new idea.’

The simile caught Otway’s fancy.

‘There is an analogy,’ he said, ‘but the simile isn’t new.’

‘I haven’t tried to take out a patent for it,’ said Carter flippantly, but with smiling politeness.

Otway gazed at him a moment as though he did not see him, and then leant out of the open window and looked into the street over the flowers.

He saw groups of well-dressed women returning from the Row, and noted how the sun shone on the glossy hats of the men. Between himself and this pleasure-loving world the distance had been steadily widening. The flowers brushing his face, the green trees and the lilacs bordering Park Lane, the leisurely throngs returning to luncheon, the whole sum of things of which they were scarcely appreciable atoms, seemed drifting down the black tide of annihilation in complacent indifference to fate. It appeared to

him that, in the huge city whose rumour reached him, he alone was conscious of its predestined doom.

Whilst he gazed out on the pleasant May day, he heard Carter discussing the points of his new pair and his wife's appreciative remarks.

'They haven't an ounce of vice between them,' said Carter, 'and they're not a bit too big for a lady to drive.'

'To eat and drink for to-morrow we die,' mused Otway, 'is the deepest human instinct in spite of the theologians.'

'They step grandly,' continued Carter, 'but their action isn't a bit exaggerated. I hate to see horses pounding themselves to pieces to give their owner an advertisement.'

Then Otway turned to the room again.

'Mr. Carter has been telling me about his new pair,' said Andria with well-balanced politeness.

'Will you drive them this afternoon with Mrs. Otway?' suggested Carter.

'No thank you. I am engaged.'

'Then you must put up with me, Mrs. Otway,' said Carter.

Otway was silent during lunch, in spite of the signs of excitement which his wife could read on his face. She knew that the pendulum that marked the oscillations of his philosophy had swung to the side of bitterness. Gradually she had discovered his contempt for human institutions and his hatred for society, but she was anxious that others should not interpret his opinions, as long practice had taught her to read them.

But when behind the commonplace sentiments of every day, in every newspaper paragraph, in the parliamentary debates as well as in the loose phraseology of social chatter, a man sees merely impenetrable phalanxes of prejudice through a mist of words, there will be occasions on which this view of life must be vividly manifested in his utterance. And so it happened that, when lunch was over, and Andria had left the two men together for a few minutes, Carter, a stranger to Otway's flashes of slumbering animosity, was the means of kindling them.

'I am afraid,' said Carter when they were alone, 'that Arthur Vincent's little escapade has worried Mrs. Vincent and your wife.'

'The disclosure of it, not its existence,' said Otway.

'In their case,' answered Carter, 'I think you exaggerate the importance of the distinction.'

'Perhaps. I never take much interest in individual cases.'

Carter became interested. He had never seen Otway so communicative before, and proceeded to 'draw' him. At that moment it was no difficult matter, since it afforded the philosopher an opportunity of following his current train of thought aloud.

So Carter learnt, with more amusement than terror, that 'the profane and ignorant mob' must bring the British Empire to ruin; that in the conflict between good and evil the defeat of the first was inevitable; and that what society regarded as its morality was merely a windy desert of decayed ethics and empty phrases. Spurred on by Arthur Vincent's deviation

from the paths of strict rectitude, his brother-in-law enjoyed a spell of intellectual exercise in which he summarised, for Carter's instruction, the leading points in his indictment against society.

Carter felt rather like an impudent freshman at his first lecture. When it was over he went up to Andria in the drawing-room, accompanied by a pleasing excuse for his dislike of Otway. He had never read *Science and Civilisation*, and was unable to compare its teachings with the author's present opinions. 'But what a trial that affable Nihilist must be to his wife!' he thought.

Having called at Arthur Vincent's chambers and left a request that he would come to Bryton Street, Otway considered his duty to his wife's family finally discharged, and dismissed the case from his perplexed mind.

Andria had left him alone with Reginald Carter in the hope that her husband might express his views on her brother's conduct less vaguely than he had condescended to do with her. The pride she had felt in Arthur had been rudely shaken. Otway's estimate of him as a young sensualist bound to yield to temptation the moment it assumed an acute form was not the least of its shocks.

'Did Mr. Otway say anything to you about Arthur?' she asked, when Carter had chosen a seat from where he could watch her face without raising her suspicion.

'He did say something,' he replied, 'but I didn't think it much to the point.'

'Let me judge, Mr. Carter.'

It is hard for a man to conceal his malice when he

has a chance of shooting it at what he considers a fitting target.

'Well,' he said, with the air of an impartial witness, 'I suggested that you and Mrs. Vincent were a bit worried over this bother, and was rather surprised when he declared it was its public disclosure that hit you hardest. I argued the point a little, of course, but he said he couldn't take interest in individual cases.'

'Is that all?' asked Andria, visibly annoyed.

'No, not nearly. Mr. Otway treated me to what I imagine must be a quotation from his book.'

'How do you know? You haven't read it.'

'I guessed.'

'Tell me exactly what he said.'

'I can't quite follow how it was Arthur's case brought him round to his rather sweeping views on the fate of the British Empire and society, and all that sort of thing. But his line of country seemed perfectly open and easy, though I've lost the path. However, he showed me how "the profane and ignorant mob," to which I somehow inferred he considered I belonged, would soon put a spoke in the wheel of what he called sham civilisation. He appears to have dropped on this fatal forecast because he's convinced the lower "human instincts" are bound to destroy the higher ones, and because society's sole moral food is a conventional code of "decayed ethics and empty phrases." But I'm sure you can imagine what he said much better than I can remember.'

'I think I can,' she answered, 'but you won't find it in his book.'

‘Perhaps it will be in the next. By George! Mrs. Otway, it will make us all sit up!’

And Andria, seeing the malicious amusement in his face, felt like a proud woman involved in the web of an intangible conspiracy organised to humiliate her.

Without speaking disrespectfully of her husband, Carter, whether he wished it or not, had effectually conveyed his true opinion of his melancholy creed.

‘What a ridiculous conversation you appear to have had,’ she said, concealing her mortification.

‘Well, of course, I couldn’t stand up against his bowling,’ he replied.

‘Did you agree with his views, then?’

‘I’m afraid I forgot to look for my own opinion. He took me rather by surprise, you know. He never said so much to me before. I never went through my “final schools,” you know, and was quite unprepared to disagree with him. The world may be a very poor sort of place, but somehow it seems good enough for me. What do you think, Mrs. Otway?’

‘I am like you, I don’t think.’

‘I am glad of that. But I’m annoying you,’ he added, ‘with my dulness. I have no pretence to be a clever fellow, and I can’t breathe in comfort in what the newspapers call an “intellectual atmosphere.” It makes me feel like a fat tourist on the top of Mont Blanc, giddy and generally indisposed. If I had known what store some people set on it, Mrs. Otway, it might have been better for me. But I’ve fallen into my dull groove, and it’s too late to pull me out. Neither you, nor your husband, nor the two universities, nor all the learned societies, could make a philosopher of me. But the phaeton has been at

the door for an hour. Do come for a drive. Let us go over to Kensington and see if Arthur is home.'

This conversation rankled in Andria's mind. She esteemed Carter as a singularly shrewd person, and he was the only one who had unconsciously told her that he thought her husband a fool.

CHAPTER XXV

PETER BENT, acting as Arthur's emissary and his mother's adviser, had played a double part with success, and Mrs. Vincent was prepared to believe that, however indiscreet and thoughtless her son might have been, there was no reason for classing him amongst the serious transgressors; and consequently repressed her inclination to cross-examine him in spite of the natural promptings of maternal curiosity.

The supper had gone off capitally. Bent and Carter had drunk almost as much champagne as Miss St. George, who had accepted their half-ironical homage as the respect which was her due and talked enthusiastically of her 'dear Artie,' his generosity, and skill as a pugilist, to the secret amusement of the observant painter. Carter, however, who took a more serious view of the festival, had availed himself of the opportunity to make Miss St. George understand his friend's position. He showed quite a fraternal interest in the young lady; agreed that Arthur Vincent was the best fellow in the world; regretted that he hadn't much money, and trusted that Miss St. George would use her valuable influence over his friend to check an extravagance which must end in disaster; and assured her that he trusted her to keep

his friend 'out of mischief' and compromising accidents generally.

'He was so nice and respectful' that Miss St. George was touched as well as flattered. Moreover, she respected him as a man of approved wealth.

'You know the soft places in a girl's heart,' she said, ogling him with a sentimentally vinous eye. 'Trust me. I'll keep Artie straight if any one can. I promise you I'll put the screw whenever he plays the fool.'

That night when Arthur paid her cab and gave the man a shilling more than his fare she reproved him for his lavishness, and, on the following day, after he had settled the bill from the livery stable with its accruing legal costs, she gave him orders to return home on the grounds that 'his hanging about her place' was detrimental to her character and reputation as a virtuous woman. At the same time she suggested that his constant attendance at the stage door was unnecessary as well as slightly ridiculous.

So Arthur, in the natural course of events, returned home, where he appeared in his mother's drawing-room a few minutes before Carter and his sister drove up in the phaeton.

'You are quite a stranger, Arthur,' said his mother, who, however, expected him. 'I hope you have enjoyed yourself.'

This may have been a scarcely skilful display of the flag of truce, but it served its purpose.

'Of course, dear Arthur,' she said, after a momentary pause, 'we were upset by what we read in the papers.'

'Naturally,' he replied. 'It was unfortunate. But

it might have happened to any one. At all events it was much worse for me than for any one else.'

This observation struck her as completely logical.

'Of course, dear,' she said. 'It must have been.'

Then, looking from the window, Arthur perceived Carter's phaeton which his sister was pulling up before the door with the skill of a practised whip.

'Here are Andria and Reggie Carter,' he said. 'What a clipping pair!'

He hoped and expected that his sister would show as much good taste as his mother, and welcomed the presence of Carter as a protection against a less conciliatory attitude.

He kissed his sister, who turned to the fraternal embrace a face of unusual austerity.

'It is some time since we met, Arthur,' she said. 'Several things have happened since then.'

'Yes,' he answered. 'There has been what the newspapers called a "miniature general election," in which my services as revising barrister were not required. And what is still more interesting to you, Carter has bought a new pair for his phaeton. They're clippers, Reggie—matched like two peas; and spanking action.'

'Glad you like 'em,' said Carter. 'They're not half bad. Had 'em fairly cheap, too, from a fellow named Moseley, who was "hammered" on the Stock Exchange last week. Mrs. Otway's good enough to approve of their action.'

'May I ring for tea, mamma,' said Andria.

'Certainly, my love,' said Mrs. Vincent, who regretted to find her daughter so 'unforgiving.'

'I hope Otway's all right, Andria,' said Arthur, to

show his indifference to a resentment which he considered unbecoming in a young married woman.

'He is quite well, thank you.'

'Still seated aloft on the philosophic peaks, I suppose.'

'It is at least an honourable seat.'

'Quite, only a little cold.'

She perceived no sign of repentance on her brother's part, but rather a latent desire to treat his *dénoûment* at the police court as a joke, which increased her indignation.

'I hope your cricket tour was successful,' she said to mark her disapproval.

'No; it fell through. I didn't go at all.'

But Carter, guessing Andria's desire to liberate her mind, stept in between the sparring.

'Seen what remarkable heavy scoring there has been at Oxford in the trial matches, Arthur? It strikes me they'll be difficulty in distributing caps this year. There're four places to fill in the team, and at least five first-class bats among the "freshers."'

'If I were the captain, I should make a couple of old "Blues" stand out,' said Arthur, glad to get out of a skirmish in which there was no honour.

Then, for twenty minutes they discussed neutral topics of current interest—such as the new way of cutting sleeves, which Mrs. Vincent objected to; the newest fashion of bicycle skirts, of which Andria approved; Peter Bent's picture of the 'lovely Countess Bewley,' in white muslin and a crook, 'quite suggestive of Gainsborough at his best' in the opinion of Beauchamp Pettit, the art critic; of Mrs. Vincent's cook's clear soup, and of her unnatural refusal to

serve dinner at eight o'clock on Sunday—of all of which topics Arthur showed an intelligent and genial appreciation, whilst his sister stood resentfully on the fringe of the small talk disdainfully listening.

'Poor Andria always will take things so seriously,' he thought as an excuse for her and for him.

But the clock striking six reminded Carter that his horses were waiting.

'You'll drive me back through the Park, won't you, Mrs. Otway?' he said. 'It will be much pleasanter than in a hansom.'

'I will, if Andria won't,' said Arthur, suspecting a manoeuvre on his sister's part to stay and 'have it out.'

'No, Mrs. Otway is going to drive,' said Carter.

'Are you strong enough, Andria?' asked Mrs. Vincent, looking on the street where the two spirited horses, petulantly shaking their polished bits, were lording it over a hansom strayed from the Cromwell Road.

'Mrs. Otway's strong enough for anything,' said Carter.

'We are quite a remarkable family,' said Arthur flippantly.

'I wish you would induce Mr. Otway to drive with you sometimes, Mr. Carter. It would be a kindness to him,' said Mrs. Vincent.

'I did try hard to-day, didn't I, Mrs. Otway?' answered Carter, 'but he wouldn't come. Said he disliked driving, and insisted Mrs. Otway should go instead.'

Now this version of the story was not strictly true, but Andria did not think it worth while to point out

its inaccuracy. She remarked, instead, that it was time they started, and that the horses were tired of waiting.

Arthur saw them to the door; Andria purposely omitted the customary farewell greeting. As they drove away he watched them from the broad white doorsteps, smiling ironically to himself.

'I am sorry, Arthur, your sister is so unforgiving,' said his mother when he returned to the room. 'But she has such very strict standards.'

Mrs. Vincent had resumed her crewel work, which, in the excitement of the last few days, had been laid aside.

'It is a pity,' said he, 'but, 'pon my word, I can't see what she has to forgive.'

Mrs. Vincent did, but refrained from stating Andria's grievance. Women, she remembered, who had no children always took a less lenient view of a man's weakness than those whose experience maternity had widened.

Andria refused to drive. The evening sun was flooding the arid correctness of the Cromwell Road, which the imposing Natural History Museum rescues from the charge of perfect Philistine pomposity. The soft vapoury clouds, rolling above its turrets and pinnacles, softened the unusual clearness of the London atmosphere with drifting shadows, but not even the spring sunshine nor the blossoming lilacs and laburnums, nor the exhilarating swing of the phaeton could restore her cheerfulness. Her observant companion, noting her depression, tried to comfort her, but she answered in monosyllables, so he came to the point and said bluntly:

'You are annoyed with your brother.'

'I am annoyed with everything,' she answered.

'Not with me?' he said uneasily.

'No, you are very kind, Mr. Carter. But nothing happens in life as we expect.'

'I wish to heaven it did!' he exclaimed feelingly.

She guessed of what he was thinking. Perhaps she was selfish, too, like Arthur. How pleasant it was to be appreciated! But was it right? Yet every one else seemed to take their inclinations for their guide, regardless of consequences, why should not she? So she silently summed up her griefs. All her earlier convictions were altering. What she had once mistaken for her husband's genius had dwindled down to a fatuous scheme of Nihilism, intelligible only if we granted that nature worked as capriciously as a ferocious child, destroying her own creations from mere lust of destruction.

Then there was her disappointment over her brother. A consuming passion even for a disreputable woman she might have forgiven, but what worthy emotion could be linked with a sordid intrigue manœuvred under a veil of vulgar subterfuge. This handsome, dashing, brilliant brother of hers, once her pride and hope, now seemed to have given her an ugly but convincing clue by which his whole character could be read. All the heroic elements had been blotted out by the revelations of the police court.

And so she mused, following the painful current of her thoughts, until Carter again interrupted her.

'You haven't spoken for ten minutes.'

They were in the Park, moving slowly in the stream of carriages. The ungainly Achilles statue

rose through the trees like a massive and clumsy mockery of the effort of the 'women of England' to honour a great military hero.

'I was thinking,' she said, 'that there is an element of burlesque in everything.'

He followed the line of her eyes. He saw what she meant, and agreeing, smiled.

'It is a stain only time removes,' she added.

'But you are bothered about something else than the "Achilles,"' he urged. 'Arthur, isn't it?'

'I am disappointed in him.'

'Will you be angry if I say something?'

'No; you have an old friend's right.'

'Well! You are measuring men by a wrong standard. I think Arthur a very fine fellow. He has brains and vigour enough for two. But he isn't a demigod, Mrs. Otway. He is just like the rest of us, neither better nor worse. What he wants he will have, whether it's good for him or not. If he can't get it he will exaggerate its value. High-minded women cannot understand these things. Perhaps if you did this world would not be the sweet place you can make it. You must learn to make allowances.'

'But do I not, Mr. Carter?'

'To a tedious old friend like me, yes. But to your brother, no. If ——' but he checked himself and flicking the off-side horse with his whip turned into Piccadilly.

'If what?' she asked, interested in the sudden sweep of the conversation.

'Oh, never mind.'

'But I do mind. Tell me.'

‘Well, if Arthur had ever had a good woman for a friend, I don’t think he would get into these scrapes.’

Sometimes his words half dragged to light the treasured and well-concealed passion which she suspected but refused to see lest the discovery cost her his friendship.

To-day she was silent and faintly dismayed. Her thoughts turned to the husband swallowed up in his brain-sick theories, to her own life across which only the shadow of love had swept, and to a day, five years ago, when the grief-stricken face of the man at her side had sent a pang of regret through a reluctant heart.

Yet, of the two who had chiefly filled her thoughts, neither her husband nor her brother possessed the simple winning enduring faith in her for which he asked no return. This was, she thought, the better side of manhood. Elaborate culture, physical prowess and the glamour it confers, seemed trifling accomplishments beside it. It seemed to her that she only learnt the value of qualities when it was too late. Carter for the first time in his life had stirred her heart with a strange emotion.

The phaeton pulled up before her door in Bryton Street. She was sorry the drive was over.

‘I am afraid I have been a morose companion,’ she said.

‘You’re worried,’ he said gently, ‘and I’m sorry. I think it has been a delightful afternoon. Please remember if I could help you in any way—with Arthur or anything—that it would make me happy.’

‘Thank you, Mr. Carter,’ she said. ‘I believe it would.’

CHAPTER XXVI

PETER BENT's ambition, as every one expected who knew his tact and the dexterity with which he and Beauchamp Pettit pushed his art, was finally crowned with success. For years he had carried on a canvassing campaign. Time after time he had been on the verge of election to an Associateship, but the preponderance of newer men in the Royal Academy had excluded him. But he was such a 'capital fellow,' so ready to admire other artists' work, so modest and unassuming in calling attention to his own, so active as a giver of dinners to doubtful voters 'who couldn't stand his tricks' that the door opened to him at last and he found himself able to write A.R.A. on his card. Not even what rival painters described as his 'impudent exploitation of the old master portrait dodge' could permanently exclude him.

'One must live,' Peter said in excuse. 'If people want me to paint them standing under brown trees in ribbons and white muslin I can't afford to refuse because the fastidious think it's a cheap trick.'

His election was followed by a flaming article in the *Journal of Contemporary Art*, from the eloquent pen of Mr. Beauchamp Pettit, entitled 'Justice at Last.' The smart people who had 'taken him up' could now regard him as a serious and learned painter. They 'boomed' him so vigorously that the coterie of aca-

demical colleagues to whose support he owed his election repented of their good nature when it was too late. In vain his enemies (generally men whom he did not know) 'deplored commercialism in art,' with Bent for an example. They could not prevent wealthy 'sitters' knocking at his studio door nor shake the public faith in his portraits 'in the Gainsborough style.'

Bent as usual rose to the occasion. In the height of the London season he gave a sumptuous 'At Home,' to which there flocked not only bright stars in the firmament of official art but brilliant ladies of the world who had persuaded themselves they were veritable leaders of fashion and had succumbed before the fascination of his draperies.

So he covered the walls of his spacious studio with his most successful work, lent for the occasion by the owners. Amongst them came the portrait of Andria and her brother. As these were painted with directness, technical skill, and unaffected feeling, they stood out vividly among the full-length portrayals of simpering ladies on lordly terraces, with beribboned hair and the cheap dignity of manufactured 'mellowness of tone.'

To give a spice of malice to walls groaning under the weight of his virtuous wealthy matrons a fiery sketch of Miss St. George, as Prince Charming in the popular ballet of *Haroun Alraschid*, was hung in a conspicuous place near some funereal drapery. It had for neighbour the 'Lady Rowena Fitzurse and her twin daughters Editha and Ethelberta.' The twins, aged three years, blue-eyed and white-frocked, with bare fat feet, seated on some remarkable brown vege-

tation, were represented toying with a 'property' lamb with a pink ribbon round its stiff neck, whilst the Lady Rowena, eight feet in height, stood, in chaste white draperies, in front of an ominous autumnal sky, extending a preternaturally delicate and slender hand towards the curly heads of her offspring. Women with strong maternal instincts have been known to drop real tears before this very large but touching canvas. The contrast between this 'condensation of the purest domestic sentiment,' to quote Beauchamp Pettit's 'notice,' and the red-legged bacchante whisking insolently across the canvas, with one shapely limb extended impudently at the level of the gazer's vision, in the words of the same sympathetic critic 'admirably represented the versatility of the distinguished craftsman from whose brush both these unique works leapt to the canvas.'

Hitherto Peter Bent had not touched the art which takes the side-scenes of a music-hall for its inspiration. His brush turned rather in the direction of the 'sugary' domestic. Beauchamp Pettit, however, who for several years had insisted on the versatility of his friend had, rather late in the day, become acquainted with the methods of choosing subjects and painting them in vogue in certain pushing coteries. He believed this trick was known in Paris as *fin de siècle* and interpreted it in his own mind as an excuse for painting permissible impropriety.

'It is time, Peter, you step across the borderland,' Pettit said one day. 'Not permanently, of course, for it doesn't pay but by way of advertisement. The new men are all dabbling in this *fin de siècle* business, and you ought to have a "go in" too.'

Bent was aware that Pettit knew nothing about painting, but he credited him with some knowledge of the public taste. So one morning he invited Arthur Vincent to lunch, and wondered casually whether his guest 'could get Miss St. George to give him a few sittings.'

'Nothing easier,' said Arthur, 'they are all keen on portraits.'

On the following Sunday, when Arthur had the pleasure of dining at Tulip Villa with Miss St. George, he told her that a friend of his, a distinguished Royal Academician, desired to paint her as 'Prince Charming.'

'Will it be stuck in the big show, Artie, darling?' she inquired eagerly.

'Almost sure to be.'

'Then tell your friend to expect me to-morrow afternoon.'

So Miss St. George brought her costume from the Eldorado to pose to 'Mr. Bent of the Royal Academy,' as she told her friends. It was a little fatiguing to stand so long on one leg, but 'Artie' was there for the sake of propriety, and the artist had a bottle of champagne and a box of sweets from Charbonnel's ready for her refreshment. Thanks to the camera which curtailed the labour of posing, she quite enjoyed herself, and playfully told the now risen painter 'he was a naughty, little, fat man, and that, if he winked at her again, she'd just tell her Artie.'

Arthur made futile efforts to suppress humorous sallies of this sort, but she attributed his efforts rather to jealousy than to 'his being over partic'lar about her be'aviour.'

'I've half a mind to ask Nettie to my At Home next week,' Bent said maliciously to Arthur when his study was finished.

'For Heaven's sake don't!' answered the young man aghast. 'You mustn't even let her know you're giving one.'

'Why not, "Artie"?' asked the painter, imitating the accent Miss St. George laid on the diminutive with its proprietary suggestions mingled with patronage.

'Because if she isn't invited she'll want to know who the deuce "Mr. Bent is that he thinks she's not good enough to meet his friends!"'

'But of course you'll come,' said Bent. 'The show wouldn't be complete without one actor in the moving drama.'

'Not I,' said Arthur.

'Why? Are you afraid?'

'No, only discreet.'

'It will give you a good chance of pretending you have never seen the lady. I think I shall hang your portraits together.'

'You are as bad as your friend Beauchamp Pettit—ready to sell your best patron for an advertisement. No. I gracefully retire on the day of your 'At Home,' leaving my reputation in your hands. Guard it as your own.'

Bent received his guests standing in the centre of his studio on a white rug once the personal property of a noble polar bear. From his position he could cast his eye on any one of his pictures merely by turning his head, and ejaculate 'so glad you like it' to the approving friends who addressed flattering comments as they passed. In a curtained recess, the

Green Hungarian Band played inspiring music whilst three white-capped maids dispensed refreshments at a massive flower-covered sideboard of carved oak which has circulated widely in several of the artist's popular Christmas scenes in the illustrated papers.

When Andria entered the room alone the studio was crowded. Since she had painted there five years ago it had been enriched with many costly 'properties,' growing in splendour with the artist's increasing success. She knew many of the guests. They said the usual things about Mr. Bent's delightful portraits, 'so like old masters, don't you know'; thought the scarlet ballet girl 'a little peculiar'; and were quite sure that Andria's portrait 'did not nearly do her justice and certainly made her look too old.'

Through the broad matronly backs, next to the 'lovely Lady Rowena and her twin daughters,' which nearly reached the ceiling and annoyed her with its bread-and-butter pomposity, Andria beheld the red-legged, active, capering figure. It was full of the occasional cleverness that Bent commanded when a subject interested him. There was life and movement and insolent beauty in the dancer.

'Grand piece of work, isn't it, Mrs. Otway?' said Beauchamp Pettit, who was invaluable at Bent's At Homes as an intelligent admirer and a former of instructed opinion. 'There's swing for you! There's movement! And what modelling! Just look at that arm!'

And the art critic made a little movement with his hand as though he were himself imparting to the rounded flesh the delicate curve which made it live.

'It is a clever study,' said Andria, 'who is it?'

'A girl who dances somewhere. Is not she a fine type? Not,' he added gallantly, 'a *grande dame*, of course, but of her class?'

Andria willingly admitted the portrait's claims and asked the dancer's name.

'Miss St. George as Prince Charming from the ballet at the Eldorado,' said Pettit, politely ignoring Andria's start of surprise, but thinking it odd she 'didn't recognise her brother's flame.'

Andria had pictured Miss St. George as a coarser and an older woman. But why had Mr. Bent painted her? Perhaps to please Arthur, for she knew the painter's friendship for her brother.

Bent was still on his rug, which stood out on the polished floor like a soft white island, receiving congratulations with bland humility, and admitting mildly to the most lavish praise that perhaps 'the painting isn't quite so bad!'

'I never knew you had painted Miss St. George,' said Andria.

'No?' he said as though her ignorance were unexpected. 'The study rather interested me.'

'It is very clever. Shall you send it to the Academy?'

'I am glad you like it, Mrs. Otway. I'm uncertain what I shall do with it. You see it is merely a study.'

'Yes,' said Andria, thinking of the Hammersmith Police Court, 'a study in *dévergondage*.'

'Exactly,' said Bent, 'that is to say, in a manner, although it never occurred to me that it was so before.'

‘What sort of person is this Miss St. George?’

‘A most respectable young person. Quite so.’

‘Did Arthur introduce her to you?’

‘Well yes. Of course I knew of his accidental acquaintance with her, and I wanted something, a little—how shall I call it?—bacchantic—you know, to light up a studio full of portraits, and having seen the young lady dance I requested her to give me a sitting. Hence that sketch of which I am, perhaps, prouder than a hard working but conscientious drudge ought to be.’

But some new arrivals claimed Mr. Bent’s attention and Andria passed on. After all, since they all insisted on it, Miss St. George might be quite a respectable young woman in real life although capable of looking a *bacchante* on the canvas.

Whilst she was studying the picture for the second time Reginald Carter, who had been hurrying through the crowd seeking her, joined her.

‘I see,’ he said, ‘you have found Miss St. George.’

‘Yes,’ said Andria. ‘And I should like to see her dance.’

‘Would you?’ said he. ‘Then I will make up a party for you and take a box. Every one goes to the Eldorado, you know.’

‘I have never been.’

Carter reflected a moment arranging the matter in his mind.

‘She seems to be capering in tune to that valse those fellows are playing now, doesn’t she?’ said Carter after they had looked at the picture in silence for some time.

But Mrs. Vincent, who had arranged to meet her

daughter at the studio but had come late, arrived on the scene.

'I want to see that Miss St. George of whom every one is talking,' she said placidly excited.

She levelled her glasses at the picture and dropt them a little dismayed.

'Cleverly painted, isn't it?' said Mr. Carter.

Mrs. Vincent looked again, this time more resolutely.

'I suppose it is,' she answered in the tone of one remote from all prejudice yet with qualms of misgiving. 'It is a little odd perhaps, but certainly she is a very well-grown young woman. But who are those pretty little girls with the lamb, Andria?'

'The twin daughters of Lady Rowena Fitzurse.'

'How positively charming! And now, my love, we will get some tea.'

And Mr. Carter, willingly taking the hint, conducted them to the crowded buffet.

CHAPTER XXVII

A FEW days after Bent's *At Home* the *Piccadilly Magazine*, a popular periodical, published a malignant, savage but original article entitled the 'Cult of Hypocrisy.' Neither the wide acquaintance with science and philosophy exhibited by the anonymous writer, nor his brilliant style, nor the extreme skill with which facts were adjusted to suit the exigencies of argument and marshalled to drive home their conclusions, would have excited more than passing notice had it not been for the cold but fanatical contempt manifested in every paragraph of the indictment, and for the cynical humour which expended its acerbity on the list of human frailties mercilessly analysed. The article produced a singular effect. No educated person read it without experiencing a mingled feeling of anger and fascination. The sentences, steeped in a subtle literary corrosive, bit into the intelligence as acids bite into metal. Ten days after its publication, it had become a topic of conversation and provoked angry replies in the newspapers. 'Even Swift,' said *The Daily Fulcrum* indignantly, 'in his bitterest mood never made so ferocious an attack on human nature and human institutions. We were, at first, inclined to regard this most astonishing production as the *jeu-d'esprit* of some accomplished man of letters, but we had not proceeded far before we were convinced of

the perfect sincerity of the writer. Whether the mind, capable of accepting and inculcating doctrine at once so distorted and alien to the kindlier sentiments of mankind, can be described as perfectly sane is a question which we must leave psychology to decide, but they strike us very much like pessimism gone mad.'

The initial mistake of the human intelligence, the anonymous writer maintained, was 'the deification of the passion of love.' To this 'perversion of a base instinct to a glorified emotion,' the hopeless and irrational forms of all civilised life were traced. The early Christian Church, perceiving the danger, strove to confine 'a necessary but degrading appetite' to its fitting place, but became itself 'the victim of the dogmatic hysteria of the unholy cult.' Thus, gradually, religion, art, literature and human liberty were debased and the future of the world has been entrusted to the rule of a 'profane and ignorant mob' in whom all the nobler aspirations have become atrophied from disuse, and who for lack of a God, worship the great modern Dagon, Hypocrisy. Then the writer proceeded to explain that the 'profane and ignorant mob' represented the blind, irresponsible force which we call 'public opinion.'

Meanwhile the conjectures to identify the writer were many, but those whose names were mentioned angrily repudiated the authorship, one prominent writer on sociology even threatening an evening paper with an action for libel for having attributed it to him.

But there was only one man in London who, a fortnight after the publication of the 'Human Cult of

Hypocrisy,' was satisfied that he could point to the author. Carter had no taste for philosophic speculation, but he was shrewd and possessed a good memory. He generally glanced into the *Piccadilly Magazine* for the sake of the 'Golf Notes' which were written by an old college acquaintance whose authority on the game he considered bore an inverse proportion to his proficiency as a player. But he had seen the 'Cult of Hypocrisy' mentioned in most of the papers, and, dimly wondering 'what it was all about,' glanced at the article to which the editor had given the place of honour. The frequent references to 'the profane mob' caught his attention and he read the article through with care. These words and their application soon brought vividly before his mind his interview with Otway when the latter had fallen into his startling spasm of communicativeness. He recalled how, starting from the point that the philosopher took no interest 'in individual cases' of wrongdoing, Otway had discussed 'evil in the mass' and predicted general ruin as the result of the 'reign of the profane and ignorant mob.'

'There is no doubt about it,' he said to himself, 'I'll swear Otway wrote that.'

He was sitting in the reading-room of the club and he flung down the magazine in the momentary excitement of conviction.

'What's the matter, Carter?' said a man near him, 'have you been reading that fellow's article in *The Piccadilly*? It may be clever, but it's dashed impudent rot, and isn't worth getting savage about. They tell me it's by Miss Boulger, the authoress of an idiotic little pamphlet called *The Degradation of Sex*,

or the Place of Man in Nature. Shouldn't be at all surprised myself.'

'Very likely,' returned Carter absently, as he left the room on his way to Bryton Street to see Mrs. Otway.

His excuse for calling—for he generally found one, perhaps quite as much to salve his own conscience as to extenuate the frequency of his visits—was the box he had taken at the Eldorado.

No man—not even one so discreet as Carter—can be seen frequently in the company of a beautiful young woman without exciting comments, usually of a jocular description spiced with malice. When she has a husband who is a recluse, the jovial view generally becomes emphatic. To keep this form of social criticism within bounds taxed Carter's ingenuity now that his assiduity had met with its reward and Andria had learnt to accept his friendship as the natural consequence of her comparative isolation.

From the end of Bryton Street he saw the victoria at the Otways' door, and Andria on the steps speaking to the servant. The day was bright and sunny; she was in white; the roses in her hat made a bright spot of colour against the grey background of the house; and the monotonous street suddenly became alive with warm emotion that beat in the young man's heart.

He had grown very weary of repressing his passion. To love another man's wife without the desire or power to conquer the passion or the hope to share it, contains the elements of the ridiculous. Carter knew this and called himself 'a contemptible fool.' But although he knew that no permanent good could come

of indulging his weakness, it brought him not a few moments of delight. The side of love which dwells within the confines of the imagination can be fed through the lover's eyes. The tall, white figure, the hat with roses, every flicker of the soft draperies for the moment alleviated his longing to increase them when he was beyond the spell of her presence.

Would she drive in his direction or to the Park, where he might miss her? The decision, trifling as he knew it to be, filled him with anxiety, but the carriage turned in his direction, and seeing him, she smiled, he thought with pleasure, and stopped the coachman.

Carter had no fixed purpose, or, if he had, he did not admit it. In the intricate conflict of impulse the resulting action is not easily traced to a source. He knew Andria was disappointed in her husband; that the shadowy intimacy that must exist between two people dwelling under the same roof was the only nuptial bond between them; that their joint lives, instead of increasing, had diminished the sympathy which at first brought them together, but he never consciously based his conduct towards her on this intuitive knowledge. Curiosity is a stronger motive for action than we admit to ourselves, since it is one for which all self-respecting men and women must find an excuse. Carter wished to discover whether Andria suspected her husband as the author of the notorious article in the *Piccadilly Magazine* which the ladies' papers had unanimously agreed was 'an outrage on our sex.'

'Whatever woman has been—squaw, housewife, or lady of fashion,' said the writer, 'she has ever been

the sullen opponent of emancipated thought in man, as well as the soft-voiced siren with an instinctive desire to turn him from the relentless call of the highest of duties. Even if man's contemptible weakness did not of itself deaden his intelligence, the vulgar materialism which represents the chief ambition of his wife will inevitably drag him to her level. From the creation of the world an Eve has stood at every man's elbow with the apple of temptation in her hand. Wise and happy is he with power to reject it.'

'I was going to call on you,' said Carter, as the victoria pulled up at the curb.

'I will take you for a drive instead,' she said, smiling.

'Where shall we go?'

'Bond Street, Piccadilly, and the Park. Will that do?'

'Splendidly.'

And they started. The summer was in the air. London looked its best.

'I have a box for the Eldorado for Friday,' said Carter. 'Will you come? We shall be a party—my sister, Mrs. Arlington, is keen on going. She will call for you, and you might pick me up at my rooms.'

Carter usually arranged these matters so as to leave the smallest balance of excuses for her to draw on.

There was no woman in London more respectable than Mrs. Arlington. To go to a music hall in her society was less open to adverse criticism than to sit in the same pew with ladies of less stalwart repute. Andria knew this, and was amused.

'How admirably you make your plans, Mr. Carter,' she said.

'They make themselves,' he answered. 'I asked my sister if she would like to go, and she jumped at it.'

Mrs. Arlington had never forgiven Andria for refusing her brother, and although the ladies exchanged formal calls, their relations had never become intimate enough to prompt them to sit in the same box at a theatre of varieties.

'Have you asked Mrs. Arlington to call for me?'

'Yes. She said she was only too glad.'

The fact was, the rumour which coupled the names of Reggie Carter and Mrs. Otway had aroused Mrs. Arlington's curiosity, and she was anxious to see them together to test its value. Thus the motives which were leading the two ladies to the Eldorado—a place of entertainment well within the bounds sanctioned by the edicts of the 'smart'—were not dissimilar.

'I found the men at the club excited about an article in the *Piccadilly Magazine*,' said Carter as the carriage turned into the rush of Piccadilly.

'The "Cult of Hypocrisy"?''

'Yes.'

'What do you think of it?'

'It's extraordinary. But perhaps I'm too dull to understand it. It's a bit down on women.'

'Philosophy is fond of stoning women. Perhaps they deserve it.'

'A few do,' said Carter. 'But what do you think of it?'

'There is a grain of truth in it.'

'So I thought. Just a grain. That gives the

article its sting. But d'you know, Mrs. Otway, I have heard all the arguments before. How on earth was it that I knew what was coming? I might have written it myself if I had learnt to string words into sentences.'

Andria felt she was turning pale. Some one else, then, suspected her husband. Such secrets were never kept.

'But I suppose you didn't write it,' she said.

'No,' he said. 'I'm only one of the "profane mob."'

These words acted as a signal. They looked at one another, and each felt the other knew.

They had turned into the Park, and drove along for some moments in silence. Sitting under the trees, in the crowd, with two other young men, was Arthur, who bowed quite coldly when he saw his sister. The unfortunate publicity which he had given to the name of Vincent still kept them apart.

Nearly every evening when he dined at home his mother said:

'I hope you have seen Andria to-day.'

He would shake his head and say that, 'He wasn't popular in Bryton Street.'

But as Andria had never 'sulked at him before,' he resented her silent disapproval as 'bad form.'

'If a man has a mistress, his married sister ought to pretend to know nothing about it,' roughly summed up his view of the matter. The modern doctrine demanding the equal morality of the sexes, to which he suspected Andria was a convert, struck him both as ridiculous and dangerous. He thought that 'the only way it was possible would be for women to come

down to man's level, and then there'd be the deuce to pay !'

'The authorship of the article is unknown still, is it not?' she said at last meaningly.

'Yes, and if the editor of the magazine keeps the secret it is *sure* to be so.'

'Quite sure, Mr. Carter.'

'As sure as I can make it, Mrs. Otway.'

CHAPTER XXVIII

OTWAY had written the article in the *Piccadilly Magazine* experimentally, and to ascertain how far the public could bear to be told what he thought the truth. Society, usually indifferent to the philosophy or the religion which proclaims its predestined doom, is sometimes annoyed at the manner in which the message is delivered. This was the case with Otway's article. Continental critics, with whom belief in English hypocrisy is so strong that if it did not exist they would straightway invent it, read the indictment with delight. Shorn of a little rhetorical embroidery, they declared that the arguments were in the main unanswerable, when applied to insular standards of conduct. Foreign correspondents telegraphed the sarcastic comments of the continental press to their papers as evidence of indiscriminating foreign hostility, and the news reached London *via* New York, that the author was a well-known ex-Cabinet minister, suspected of extreme misanthropy, who had avenged political defeat by secretly discharging the part of a philosophical Cassandra.

Finally, Andria made up her mind to accuse her husband who had been preparing himself to face the storm. The article was the brief epitome of the book which was to cut the philosophic link, binding him to the less unpopular doctrines of his former work. But

to publicly renounce a creed by which fame and respect have been won for another whose tenets are banned and ridiculed, demands more contempt of human opinion than a man of Otway's vacillating temperament is generally prepared to display. This is why he had published the 'Cult of Hypocrisy' anonymously.

Cunningham, the editor of the magazine, sent him the press cuttings and impressed on him the extreme difficulty of keeping his name from the public.

'You will be amused to hear,' he wrote, 'that I have received letters suggesting that the author of *Science and Civilisation* should be requested to reply to the "anonymous defamer of the human race" responsible for the "Cult of Hypocrisy." If, then, in an early number of the magazine you will, over your own name, refute what I suspect to be an untenable position assumed by you for dialectical purposes, the proprietors will not haggle about terms and the controversy will have a most felicitous ending.'

But to see his confession of faith thus regarded as a practical joke aroused Otway's anger. And it was whilst he was absorbed in this case of conscience that Andria entered his study with the *Piccadilly Magazine* in her hand.

'I want to talk to you about this article, please,' she said, pointing to the open page before her. 'I suspect who wrote it.'

'Whom?' he asked coldly.

'You. Will you please tell me if I am right?'

In his hand was Cunningham's letter.

'This letter will explain,' he said.

Then, standing beside the great writing-table with

the formidable drawers and lettered pigeon-holes, she read it, finding momentary comfort in the last few lines.

'Then you are not really in earnest?'

'Do you imagine that the article is an elaborate joke?' he asked.

'I hoped it might be.'

'I mean every word of it. All I said is true.'

'True!' exclaimed his wife indignantly. 'It is malignant, ridiculous, absurd!'

He swung round his chair and faced her.

Hitherto Otway had attributed his wife's lost interest in his work to a woman's natural aversion to the 'things of the intellect.' It had never occurred to him that indifference veiled disappointment. But she had never attacked him before, and, recalling her former respect for his opinions, he was astonished and displeased.

'To folly and ignorance,' he retorted, 'all seems ridiculous and absurd save their own inaptitude.'

'Where is the Louis Otway who wrote *Science and Civilisation*?' she asked. 'Is he dead?'

'Dead! No. Intellectually born again. Slowly and surely he has groped his way to the light.'

'Light,' she returned. 'There is not a spark left in your blind Nihilism. Listen. "Whatever woman has been, squaw, housewife, or lady of fashion, she has ever been the sullen opponent of emancipated thought in man." Do you believe that?'

'Certainly.'

This was too much for Andria. She had intended to be becomingly calm and critical, but loosed the reins of her restraint.

'Have I tempted you?' she asked, heedless of his feelings in her anger. 'Have I dragged you down to the level of my "vulgar materialism," or stood at your elbow with the "apple of temptation" which you, happy man, have had the power to reject?'

'To answer you would be to open a discussion—a painful discussion,' he answered, still outwardly unmoved, 'that I wish to avoid.'

'But the explanation must come,' she said. 'It is right that you should know that I agree with your other critics.'

'I am indifferent to the praise or blame of an illiterate mob,' he said contemptuously.

'So are all fanatics.'

Otway hated the word fanatic. In freedom from bigotry lay his pride. He turned his pale eyes on his wife with a frown.

'I do not expect you whose whole life is a pursuit of frivolous amusement or those like you to understand me.'

'Perhaps I served as a model for this'—she hesitated for a contemptuous word—'diatribe,' she added, striking the magazine contemptuously with her hand.

'You forget I never draw conclusions from individual cases,' he answered, deeply irritated. 'You also forget the respect which is due to me.'

'I respected the scholar and gentleman who wrote *Science and Civilisation*, but I cannot look on at his moral suicide calmly as though I were an irresponsible child. If it becomes known that you are the author of this, your reputation will be utterly destroyed. You feared this or you would have printed your

name. As it is, others suspect you of having written it.'

'Who, besides yourself?'

'Mr. Carter.'

'What, that dawdler!'

'His leisure has not destroyed his common sense,' she retorted.

'Did he tell you?'

'He never told me directly that you wrote it, but he referred to the "ignorant and profane mob"—the phrase is rather a favorite of yours—in a manner that made his meaning clear. He discovered the authorship, as I did, by what, I suppose, you would call internal evidence.'

'I suppose the gallant sportsman will wave his discovery in the face of the public like a trophy!'

'He will never speak of it.'

'Whether he does or not is unimportant.'

'What!' exclaimed Andria aghast, 'you mean to admit that you wrote it?'

'A man admits a thing he is ashamed of. I shall write to the editor of the magazine and *claim* the authorship, you have made me decide.'

'*The Fulcrum* said no man completely sane could have perpetrated the miserable article.'

'*The Fulcrum* writer is a paltry scribbler, stung to abuse by my whip.'

'The whip will be for your back. Fancy what your fate will be. A few weeks' abuse and then, when the public are tired of the scandal, contempt and oblivion. I have every right to appeal to you. When I married you I thought you were a man, great and wise and good. You shut yourself up away from

me in your morbid intellectual seclusion of which this odious attack on men and women is the diseased fruit. It is the work of a sick brain. Make an effort! Be a man again! Let me help you! I loved you once. If you will let me, I will love you again.'

The restrained anger of the bigot which burnt in him now found a fitting issue.

"From the creation of the world," he said slowly and solemnly, like a judge pronouncing the doom of a criminal, "'an Eve has stood at every man's elbow with the apple of temptation in her hand," wise and happy is he who has the power to reject it.'

Then she looked at him, almost hating him for the moment.

'Is that your answer?' she asked.

'Yes.'

'Then I have no more to say.'

They exchanged one long look of resentment, then she left the room.

When she was gone he pressed his hand on his heart, which, weakened by long toil and mental exhaustion, was leaping painfully from the agitation of the dispute. From a drawer in the table he took a small phial and poured some drops of the pale yellow liquid it contained into the hollow of his hand and inhaled it. In a few moments the sense of oppression was removed, and after a short rest he wrote the letter which his wife's interference had provoked.

CHAPTER XXIX

A FEW hours after her quarrel with her husband, Andria perceived her mistake. She had dared a fanatic to advertise his zealotry when she ought to have known he had no fear of the consequences which his reckless defiance of society entailed. She remembered now that Huxley speaks of 'the halt, the lame and the blind of the world of consciousness.' Might it not be that her husband's mental change classed him with these as a being only partially responsible? If his powers had been shaken by some morbid process of change, did he not rather deserve pity than reproach? There was something pathetic in the self-imposed isolation of the man, and, notwithstanding the insult by which he had repulsed her, she pitied. Thus, in spite of the obstinacy which even the most amiable women, who regard themselves as ill-used, bring into a quarrel, Andria now perceived her interference had hastened the catastrophe which it was intended to avert.

She knew Otway would write to Mr. Cunningham authorising him to publish his name. But it might not be even now too late to request the editor of the magazine to disregard the capricious wish of a perverse but distinguished scholar to wreck his honourable achievements in a passing fit of mental aberration. But Andria was not acquainted with Mr.

Cunningham. She thought at first of consulting her brother, but then there was the smouldering resentment as a barrier between them. So once more she turned to the only friend ready to obey her wishes with unquestioning zeal.

In no mood to be stopped by trifles, Andria dressed, ordered the carriage to be ready in half an hour, despatched a telegram herself to Carter at his club, telling she wished to see him on urgent business, and that she would call there at four o'clock.

Returning from the post-office she passed her husband, who, on the other side of the road, either did not, or pretended not, to see her. Now her anger had spent itself, regret and pity were taking its place. Everything in her life seemed more and more awry; yet there was no one to blame for it but herself. If she had married the wrong man was it not her duty to make the best of it? Had she done so? She thought she had tried. But he was so distinct a deviation from the type of manhood which nature has fixed, that her failure was complete. For years they had been as far apart as it is possible for two dwellers under the same roof to be, but now by a strange and paradoxical twist of the emotions, she seemed nearer to him in consequence of their first open quarrel. Perhaps it had thawed the frost that reduced his personal atmosphere to the point at which resentment is congealed to icy hostility, and affection to a tolerance of proximity.

Carter was standing on the broad steps of his club when she drove up.

'What is it?' he asked eagerly, as they shook hands.

Andria found that what she desired to say was more difficult than she expected. It compelled her to place her husband in a contemptible light before the man who, she suspected, regarded him as an unworthy but successful rival. No woman of Andria's impulsive temperament states these matters clearly to herself. They rather lurked among the shadowy convictions adumbrated on the consciousness where they shirk the stern eye of self-respect.

'Come for a drive,' she said, 'and I will tell you.'

Some men at the big bow-window of the club, seeing the meeting and the departure, exchanged significant smiles.

'I wish to consult you,' said Andria, as they drove towards Trafalgar Square.

'Not about Arthur?' he said.

'No; about Mr. Otway.'

'Oh,' exclaimed Carter, surprised into an interjection of dubious import.

'You guessed who wrote that article?'

'Yes.'

'My husband?'

'Yes. I thought so. When I last lunched with you he took me over the same ground, and used the same words.'

'He did write it,' said Andria, looking straight before her. 'For many months past, Mr. Carter, I have suspected this—how shall I describe it?—morbid change in his opinions. In fact he is not himself.'

Carter was quite prepared to learn that Otway had made 'a fool of himself,' but disinclined to attribute it to any remotely excusable phenomena.

‘Over-work, no exercise, too much concentration on one subject?’

‘Yes, almost monomania. I have spoken to him, and I’m afraid annoyed him uselessly for he has written to Mr. Cunningham, the editor of the magazine, giving him instructions to publish his name. Now this must be prevented, Mr. Carter.’

‘But how?’

‘That is what I want to consult you about.’

‘What would you propose?’

‘We must tell Mr. Cunningham that the article was originally intended to start a controversy and in no way represents Mr. Otway’s convictions, which are, as we all know, contained in his book. In fact, we must appeal to Mr. Cunningham to disregard the capricious wish of a distinguished scholar to commit intellectual suicide in a moment of mental weakness.’

Carter was touched by her agitation although he translated her euphemisms rudely enough.

‘Otway,’ he grimly reflected ‘was nearly off his head. To insist on putting his name to an article only fit for the Bedlam Gazette for the pleasure of annoying his wife, who was ashamed of him, argued incipient insanity. The problem was to save a man’s reputation in spite of himself by an appeal to a practical editor with an eye to the circulation of his magazine!’

Under other circumstances the irony of the situation would have been amusing.

Seeing his hesitation Andria was discouraged.

‘Isn’t it possible?’ she asked. ‘Think of the disgrace.’

‘I think you exaggerate that,’ he answered. ‘Men

do change their opinions. But it does not follow that we believe what we like."

"The excitable, noisy, noisy crowd of men like Louis Otway."

But Carter was neither interested in them nor grant this exemption.

"Do you know the address of the magazine?" he asked.

"No, but he is a Mr. Cunningham and he lives in Covent Garden."

"Perhaps Peter Bent might know him. He knows Beauchamp Peter writes things in the *Illustrated Magazine*. I've seen his name there."

Andria grasped at the word.

"Let us go to Mr. Bent's at once, to see."

So the victoria, which had been taking her to solitude of the embankment, it is a long way to shine, beside the broad, low, sunny, grassy bank, a flotilla of lazy barges, now turned into a narrow course and drove swiftly in the direction of the bridge.

As they threaded their way through the busy traffic of Victoria Street, Andria was a little of discordant elements in her place. She was a woman she had rejected the conventional life of the middle class, and she had taken a step from which she stepped with her eyes fixed on its meaning to the simplest form.

But Carter enjoyed the position as a critic and adviser and was not anxious to leave it. He was a friend the artist and his progress was his own.

"I will see Bent if you will. He lives at the end of the street. We'll go to see him."

the alliance—‘we might trust Peter, but not the gossip-hunting little journalist. Never trust a pressman with a secret he can sell!’

They had reached the quiet street linked in every detail with a happy year of Andria’s life. She remembered the feeble acacias whose blossoms in June were yet vigorous enough to scent the narrow gardens with odours of the south, and the emulous red-bricked studios which, under a covering cloud of art and culture, hid the rivalries of ‘opposition shops.’

Whilst waiting for Carter, Andria ruefully compared her earlier anticipations with their present realisation. It was humorously pathetic to remember how, a few years ago, in that leafy, curving street, she had taken herself seriously as an art student and that it had been left for the man she married to dispel her illusions. Time’s revenge is often swift. Now she was trying to save him from his folly! She had never since found so much quiet enjoyment as her hesitating palette, her feeble brush and her girlish ambition had given her. To-day she was a dissatisfied woman of the world who thought her heart was hardening because her hopes of wifedom and motherhood had been deceived.

But her physical and mental balance was too well adjusted to yield to disappointment. She faced despondency like a combatant and the sight of Carter hurrying down the street with a card in his hand quickly roused her again.

On it was written, ‘Mr. Graham Cunningham, 12 Eldane Road, Kensington, W.’

‘Somewhere in the desert country beyond Addison

Road Station,' explained Carter gleefully. 'I got it from Peter without even exciting his curiosity; though that's always active.'

But Andria was too excited to listen to the details.

A quarter of an hour's drive brought the carriage before a newly erected and pretentious villa of yellow brick. Antique Roman numbers above the small brass knocker showed Andria that her destination was reached.

'Shall I come in too?' said Carter obeying the directions to knock and ring, to prove his claim to be a visitor and not a messenger.

'No, I would rather see Mr. Cunningham alone.'

The servant who came admitted that her master was at home, but added that he was busy.

'Please give him my card and tell him my business is most urgent.'

So Andria found herself in a small drawing-room 'artistically' furnished after the school of Tottenham Court Road, wondering how she should begin.

Outside she heard the sound of a clothes-brush. Mr. Cunningham was shaking the dust of literary travail from his coat. He was a short man, of about forty, with fat shoulders, rather rough hair, short brown beard, and eyes that looked intelligent, business-like, harassed and good-natured.

'I want to see you, Mr. Cunningham, about my husband's article,' said Andria.

He started in momentary surprise.

'You know he wrote it then?' he said.

'Yes.'

'When he arranged with us to publish it it was on the understanding that complete anonymity should be

maintained,' said the editor. 'We have kept to our bargain, although it's been no easy matter.'

'It will be disastrous to us if it becomes known,' resumed Andria. 'It ought never to have been printed.'

'It has had a big sale,' said the editor in whose eyes circulation covered a multitude of literary sins.

'Yes, because it is scandalous and inhuman.'

'It's clever too,' interposed the editor impartially, 'but not I admit exactly the thing the public expected from the author of *Science and Civilisation*.'

'I am ashamed that my husband should have written it. He never would have if his intellect had not become clouded.'

'But surely his intellect is as vigorous as ever, Mrs. Otway. The fact is, as I told him in a note yesterday, we regard it rather——'

'Yes, I know, Mr. Otway showed me your letter—as written for controversial purposes.'

'Exactly. To annoy the rather pompous school who are always waving "progress" in the public's face.'

'He told me two hours ago that he meant and believed every word of it, and he has written to tell you to publish his name. Now you must not humour this suicidal caprice, Mr. Cunningham. When he is strong again—he is overtaxed and brain-weary now—he will repent. We have no right to allow an invalid to ruin a career that has been brilliant, in a fit of feverish petulance.'

Mr. Cunningham had become deeply interested. The frown, indicative of his solemn duties, with which he was wont to daunt angry contributors, whose articles he had rejected or whose manuscripts

he had lost, now changed for the air of polished chivalry, due to a beautiful, agitated, and winning woman. He saw himself, with pleasurable excitement, on the fringe of an adventure promising to give vivid colour to the monotony of an existence poised over the smell of the printer's ink.

'But,' he said sympathetically, 'if Mr. Otway insists I shall be helpless.'

'Could we not humour him in some way?' said Andria, aghast at the weakness of the case.

'Unfortunately, Mr. Otway has only to tell the first friend he meets that he wrote the article for it to be known all over London in twenty-four hours,' said the editor. 'I agree with you, Mrs. Otway. It would be a grave indiscretion to acknowledge the article. If written by a clever undergraduate in the first glory of his pessimistic agnosticism it would show much distorted talent, but its views are untenable by a man in Mr. Otway's position. The brain, however, is a delicate piece of mechanism easily disordered, but which frequently rapidly recovers with rest and change. From what you say, I fear he is not in a state of mind to bear the truth. I will try to persuade him that his unpopular teaching will have a better prospect of gaining attention if set forth anonymously. To publish his name would be to furnish hostile writers with a weapon against him. They can silence his views of to-day with his opinions of yesterday. There will always be *Science and Civilization* to refute the "Cult of Hypocrisy." Thus, whatever truth may underlie his later views, it must be robbed of all weight if openly preached by him. It seems to me this is the only line we can adopt.'

Andria was pleased with a proposal offering some slight chance of escape from the difficulty, and sparing her husband's feelings which her own impetuous temper had wounded.

The editor felt the comforting glow of self-approval her grateful words called forth.

'I shall never forget your kindness and charming tact, never !' she said with heightened colour. Then he escorted her to the door, and, seeing the carriage waiting, wondered 'what the deuce the man had to do with the business.'

'I hope you will come and see me sometimes, Mr. Cunningham,' she said, as she shook hands with him on the steps. 'I am always at home on the first and second Thursdays.'

'What luck?' asked Carter.

'Better than I expected.'

Then, as they drove away, she praised the ingenuity of the editor's scheme so warmly that Carter was half jealous and wondered whether so much trouble had ever been taken before to prevent 'a fellow making a fool of himself,' and if he (Carter) wanted to 'give himself away' whether any one would get up half an hour earlier to prevent it.

CHAPTER XXX

It was six o'clock when Andria arrived home, full of regret for her harshness towards her husband, and resolved to try what care and sympathy could do to restore the edge to his intellect.

Resentment having been quenched by pity, something of maternal sympathy for the irresponsible petulance of a sick child possessed her. Hitherto she had measured him by the standard of her earlier marriage, but if a strange form of neurosis clouded his mind and weakened his brain, was it not her duty to act as a loyal ally in combating the evil, and not as the hostile critic of its results? And so, repenting of the error into which a quick temper had driven her, she decided, at every cost to her own pride, to seek a reconciliation. If he had been home that evening she would have made the first overtures, but she learnt that he was dining out. Evidently he wished to avoid a renewal of the dispute. Probably he had made one of his rare visits to the club.

So Andria dressed and dined alone, and then sat in the drawing-room waiting for Mrs. Arlington to take her to the Eldorado. At nine o'clock, instead of his sister, Reginald Carter was shown into the room.

'It is most unlucky,' he said in explanation. 'My sister is prostrate with the obscure malady she describes as *migraine*, but for which her doctor has a

coarser name. She can't come. What's to be done?'

Then, remembering her curiosity to see Miss St. George, Andria felt slightly annoyed.

'I'm very sorry your sister is ill.'

'I'm doubly sorry. It's so inopportune! I suppose you must have a chaperon, Mrs. Otway?'

'Why?'

'For Mrs. Grundy.'

'Don't you know I have rejected her authority all my life?'

'Yes, and very successfully, too. Is your husband in?'

'No; he is dining at his club, I fancy.'

'Could we not call for him? It might amuse him. Miss St. George's dancing, and the humours of the Brothers Ben and Alick Barnet, the *fin de siècle* humourists, would bring him down to grapple with the actual.'

Andria did not see the slightest reason why she should not go to the Eldorado alone if she wished it. According to her own social canons, which placed no restrictions on the amusements of women, whether married or single, the reign of Mrs. Grundy was ended.

It was two years since she had asked her husband to go with her to the theatre, and she remembered how he had sat in unsmiling disapproval through a popular farce, of which the machine-made jokes annoyed a sense of dramatic proportion founded on a serious study of Sophocles. Still, if she, who had not asked a favour for very many months, requested him to go with her that evening, he might at least perceive she bore no rancour for the bitter gibe which had ended

their encounter in the afternoon. So she accepted her companion's proposal.

Andria went to her room for her cloak, whilst Carter waited. The love which he had controlled but endured without an effort to defeat, was strong within him. For five years he had spent many hours a month in the society of the woman who made his heart throb whenever she approached him. To hold her cool hand a moment in his when he came or when he went was his only solace and reward. On the table, beside a silver tray, and the cup in which her coffee had been served, lay a delicate pink rose. He had seen it fall, broken from its stem in the bosom of her white dress, and she had placed it under the shaded light where it glowed, in gracious pink and white fragrance, a fitting emblem of his repressed passion.

The idea of a young man kissing a rose because he cannot kiss the woman who has worn it condemns itself; but the captivating fragrance of the flower stole into his blood, half solacing for the moment his aching senses, although the silent critic of his actions whispered mockingly, 'O you fool!'

He was standing with his back to the window, and, as Andria moved softly on the thick carpet, through the open door of the room, she saw him, reflected in a mirror. And she, who had dreamed of love but only known its wan shadow, was troubled. The petals fell on a wide white rug one by one, and turning, he saw her but never knew what the mirror had revealed.

This evidence of the love he concealed under a veil of respectful but affectionate friendship through which

it rarely pierced, touched her deeply. If she had married this man how different her life would have been!

Whilst the brougham rolled softly and swiftly towards Pall Mall, they sat in silence, each absorbed in thought, but it was the unembarrassed natural silence of an unconscious understanding. But when she spoke he thought her voice had a tenderer ring.

The brougham pulled up by the great club house whose roof has covered two generations of famous men of letters. Grey heads illumined by reading lamps, bending over the evening papers, were visible through the open windows.

'Please tell Mr. Otway that I ask him as a personal favour to come,' she said.

But after a brief interview with the hall porter, Carter returned. Otway had left the club half an hour ago.

'I am sorry,' said Andria.

But Carter was not, although in no mood for the blatant vigour of the Eldorado.

'Shall we go all the same?' he asked.

'Yes,' said Andria; 'if you have no objection.'

The box was large; Andria could sit back unseen if she desired it. The great house, radiant with a thousand electric lights, through which the dim grey cigar smoke stealthily curled, was filled with the infectious strains of a popular tune, with the hum of cheerful chatter, and the crude sensual ease that follows the abandonment of an intellectual ideal.

The famous Madame Sansgene, imported at enormous costs from Paris, was about to sing. She was

neither young nor pretty, nor possessed of a good voice, she was not even *franchement canaille*, but she had discovered a new and personal method of rendering veiled improprieties in the latest Parisian *argot* that attracted whilst it repelled. Andria recognised the base novelty of the art displayed. In its unbridled contempt for the fresher and unartificial emotions, she thought she could trace analogies between Madame Sansgene's attitude as a vocalist and the contemptuous pessimism of her husband's article. He treated the traditional sentiments as the flattering assumptions of hypocrisy; Madame Sansgene derided them as ridiculous ideals, to be tolerated with a contemptuous smile in the provinces and the convent school, but to be repudiated with a comic sneer in the select circles of approved 'smartness.'

'What do you think of her?' asked Carter.

'She is original, clever, but——' Andria's critical expressions failed her and she left him to fill it in.

'That means you would like to have her strangled.'

'No, there is meaning in her. She represents a pose, what my husband calls, "Man's contempt for himself." That woman's song embodies aspirations a few of these people here really desire to feel and so tickles their morbid vanity.'

After several dull turns, the music began to prepare the audience for the ballet, and the groups of well-grown young women, the crimsoned-limbed Miss St. George among them, trooped on the stage.

'She is like Mr. Bent's picture,' said Andria.

The audience, recognising Miss St. George, applauded.

'She is more popular than ever,' said Carter.

'In consequence of her late advertisement?' asked Andria contemptuously.

'It can scarcely be for improvement in dancing,' he replied.

Miss St. George threw all her opulent youth and spirits in her work and twinkled across the limelights alluringly.

Carter wondered whether Andria could see any excuse for her brother. But she was a woman, taught by her own experience to subdue passion by pride, and she saw none, beholding only a handsome temptress whose lavish physical gifts, flung into the balance of the world's evil, added one more burden to the shoulders of youthful duty.

But though she bent disapproving eyes on the dancing girl she watched her closely; and, leaning slightly over the plush-covered ledge of the box, suddenly she became aware that her brother Arthur, standing near the orchestra, was watching them with a frowning face.

'There is Arthur!' said Andria.

But when Carter turned to look, the throng, moving towards the glittering bar, had swept him away.

'He seemed to think that I had no right to be here!' she said.

Carter, recalling how stern a stickler for 'good form' Vincent was, suddenly remembered his own conduct was open to criticism.

'He thinks I came out of curiosity,' she added, secretly admitting this supposition was well-founded.

'It was my fault for suggesting it,' said Carter.

'No. But I wish we had not seen him. We have not spoken for weeks.'

The ballet was followed after by an elaborate transformation scene.

Andria waited to see the commencement, but finding it tedious and the air oppressive, proposed that they should go.

The promenade and the galleries were crowded with the throng usually described by the word 'mixed,' a qualifying adjective, which in this application has rather a moral than a social signification. To avoid it they followed a group of blameless provincial ladies who had put their hats under the seats and were now busily adjusting them as they followed an official, who showed them a means of exit which avoided the contaminations of the crowded promenade.

Descending the staircase two or three feet in advance of her companion, suddenly Andria saw Miss St. George in a large hat crowned by a magnificent white ostrich feather, and otherwise splendidly arrayed.

They passed, but Miss St. George, suddenly recognising Carter cried:

'Hullo, Reggie! seen my boy Artie?'

'Haven't seen him,' said Carter, hurrying on to join Andria.

Miss St. George, unaccustomed to such rebuffs, glared after him for an indignant moment.

Andria heard the 'hullo, Reggie,' and the 'seen my boy Artie' made her hot and red with shame.

'Do you know her too?' she asked reproachfully.

'A little.'

Andria was too proud to seek any further explanation.

As they drove home, however, she exclaimed in the midst of a constrained silence, 'I wish we had never gone to that wretched place.'

'So do I,' he said, 'since it has displeased you.'

The carriage stopped before her door. He handed her out and rang the bell.

'Thank you for taking me,' she said. 'Good-night!'

'Good-night!' he answered sadly as the servant opening the door, which must close on him, showed how vain his poor love was.

'Is Mr. Otway in?' she asked the servant.

'He has gone to his room, madam,' replied the man.

Passing his door she saw the light beneath and heard his short cough that lately had persistently troubled him.

In her own room was a large photograph of her brother. That evening the careless handsome beauty of the face pained her. On how base an altar, she thought, had that beauty been sacrificed!

The common accent, the haunting 'seen my boy Artie,' brought her past ambitions for him to the level of a Cockney comic song. But remembering how 'that woman' had called Mr. Carter 'Reggie' she was compelled to associate a vulgar accent with the rose that her lover had kissed. 'Are we so weighed down with our flesh,' she wondered, 'that no fancy can be dissociated with some taint?'

The beauty she saw in the long pier-glass before her seemed wasted. In a few years that too, like her

illusions, would be gone. What was it worth now? She knew women with an eighth of her beauty and a quarter of her intelligence who were many times more happy. But the memory of her rose still oppressed her. She opened her door. The house was silent: the light under her husband's door extinct. She lighted a candle and descended the stairs to the dark drawing-room. On the white rug still lay the fallen rose leaves. On, two, three, four—she counted eight—soft pink petals. She knew where the rest of the flower was! He had kept that. She collected the scattered petals, guiltily, self-reproachfully, like a woman half yielding to a lover, and carried them to her room, placing them carefully in an empty jewel case, whilst the dry short cough from her husband's room seemed the sardonic mockery of her growing weakness.

CHAPTER XXXI

ARTHUR VINCENT was angry with his sister chiefly because he felt she had ceased to admire him. Than this there are fewer causes of family resentment. Once all he did seemed right in her eyes, but now she apparently ranked him in the army of commonplace, vulgar, ineffectual and despised sinners. This was galling to his vanity for he could not help admiring Andria. To say that she was 'very unforgiving' as his mother did, was neither an excuse for his sister nor a consolation for himself.

Two incidents occurred which brought his wrath to the explosive point. One day he had lunched with an acquaintance who was a member of Carter's club. In the smoking-room he had overheard a conversation that deeply displeased him.

It was simple enough. Two men within his hearing were speaking of Carter.

'Who,' asked the first, 'is that pretty woman who's always calling here for him?'

'A Mrs. Otway,' said the other. 'The wife of that philosopher fellow Otway.'

'That accounts for it,' said the first man laughing. 'A philosopher is excuse enough for anything. I was at Oxford with him. They said odd things about his feeling for women.'

Then, in a voice that was inaudible, they continued

a conversation accompanied by the sort of laughter that an experienced ear associates with smoking-room discussions of incongruous relations of the sexes.

On the following evening with this incentive to disapproval in his mind, Arthur saw his sister and Carter at the Eldorado. Their presence there was a double cause of anger to him. It gave point to the gossip he had overheard, and represented that nameless and indefinite form of revolt against etiquette embraced under the definition of 'bad form.'

'If,' he said to himself, 'they think they can do this kind of thing because Otway's a dull-eyed mole, I'll let them both know they are making a mistake.'

Then he left the auditorium for the promenade in extreme indignation. Soon afterwards he met Miss St. George in an equally irate mood after her encounter with Carter. The frown was still on her face.

'That friend of yours, Reggie Carter,' she said, 'is a rude beast. He behaved to me like a common cad. Call himself a gentleman indeed!'

'Why? What has he done?' asked Arthur.

'I met him jes' now,' she said, and her English suffered from her excitement, 'goin' out, and thought he was alone. I arst him politely whether 'e'd seen you, and what d' you think? First he pretended not to see me, then he spoke to me jes' as though I was a common woman! Rude beast and cad! Who's 'e to give himself airs, I'd like to know? I didn't see he was with a woman or I shouldn't have spoken. But he was tied to the apron-strings of a big good-lookin' woman, the "smart" lot, you know the sort I mean,

who look down on us artists ! I'll let Master Reggie Carter know what I think of 'im, you bet !'

This tirade deeply offended Arthur, and lowered him in his own estimation.

'Don't be silly,' he said crossly. 'Leave Reggie Carter alone. I don't suppose he meant to be rude.'

'Rude indeed ! the beastly cad never so much as touched his hat. Treated me as though I was so much dirt. I know his club. It's the same one as poor little Leger belonged to, him I treated so badly, and who was a little gentleman. Look here, Artie, don't you take his part or we shall quarrel.'

'I tell you, Nettie,' returned Arthur angrily, 'that you must not be silly.'

'That Carter must apologise to me, and you ought to make him.'

'I'm not disposed to enter into another vulgar quarrel,' retorted Arthur, 'so, please, let this matter drop.'

'Vulgar ! I'm no more vulgar than you are. Look here ! Either you ask that feller what he means, or it's all over between you and me, I tell you straight ! It's lucky we're not married, or I'd 'ave you orderin' me about all over the shop.'

Poor Nettie fell heavily into the gutter in moments of excitement; the collapse so much marred her charms that Arthur for the moment was freed from their spell.

They were standing on the pavement. A soft rain was falling, and the liquid mud was splashing over the curb as the cabs rolled away from the flaring light of the music-hall into the comparative gloom of the streets.

'I shall not speak to Reggie Carter,' said Arthur.

When he said he would not do a thing there was no mistaking his meaning.

'P'r'aps, then, you'll call me a hansom! Mr. Vincent,' said Miss St. George, with deadly dignity, 'as I've no further wish to stand in the wet with a feller like you.'

'Hansom!' exclaimed Arthur, hailing a passing driver.

The man stopped. She sprang in in angry agility, the muddy wheel smearing the lavish silks of her dress.

'Will you permit me to pay?' he asked.

'Pay! it's little enough you care to pay for,' she cried hoarsely.

Arthur gave the man three shillings.

'Tulip Villa, Felix Grove, off the Fulham Road.'

The man grinned, and said, 'All right, sir.'

'Will you have the glass down?' said Arthur.

'The rain will spoil your feather.'

But before she could answer, the driver let it down, and turned his horse into the stream of traffic that swept from the theatres on a westward course.

Standing alone on the wet pavement, Arthur felt foolish and angry, but he hailed another cab, and drove home, determined to find a vent on the morrow for what he considered his most just wrath.

standing with Otway at all costs grew to a settled purpose.

She was convinced that he was ill. She had learnt to associate his peculiar short quick cough with a weak heart. The exercise in the tepid but exhilarating morning air strengthened her resolution and enlarged her magnanimity. Whatever her husband's faults might be, they were totally distinct from the ignoble vices which she believed to be the attributes of other men. To him, in his absorption, trifles were trifles; the world of thought more real than the world of vulgar facts. His fault was to distort life and to view it in its perverted prospective.

Then might not his intellectual decadence be the result of his moral solitude? Perhaps, if she could force a passage into the realm of negation where he dwelt apart, she might raise the frosty temperature to something nearer the glow of healthy human sympathy.

But when she contrasted her delicate project with her present pastime the spirit of mockery raised its head. One factor in the problem was represented by a healthy but disappointed young woman restoring her cheerfulness by bicycle exercise, the other by a sick-brained philosopher bent on ruining his reputation against her will.

Meanwhile, in his study, Otway was considering how to reply to Mr. Cunningham's letter. For a man like Cunningham to appoint himself the unsolicited counsellor of a scholar of his reputation struck Otway, in spite of the respectful diffidence of the tone adopted, as presumptuous.

But at this point of his reflections the servant inter-

rupted him, and said that Mr. Vincent wished to speak to him.

‘Ask him to come in.’

‘I wanted to see Andria,’ said Arthur, as he closed the door, ‘but she’s out on her bicycle.’

‘I will give her your message, or if you prefer it you can write a note,’ said Otway.

‘I think I had better tell it to you since you are interested in it.’

Arthur felt a stronger inclination than usual to make his brother-in-law ‘sit up.’ He considered it was every man’s duty to keep his wife in order; he also thought this was a duty Otway neglected. There was no discipline in his household !

Arthur was in a bad temper; the fragment of mechanical attention his brother-in-law bestowed on him increased it.

‘I am much annoyed with Andria,’ he said, bluntly, ‘and I wish you would give her a hint.’

‘Indeed?’

‘Yes. And it will come better from you than from me.’

‘Your sister does exactly as she likes.’

‘Yes; that’s the worst of it. Women always do something that’s bad form when they do.’

‘What unwritten law in your peculiar code of etiquette has she transgressed?’ asked Otway.

‘She allowed her curiosity to conquer her good taste—that’s all,’ said Arthur, tapping his boot irritably with his stick.

‘In what way?’

‘She went to the Eldorado last night with Reggie Carter to see Nettie St. George dance.’

'Miss St. George is your friend, is she not?' said Otway.

'Yes; and under the circumstances, I consider it very bad form for Andria to go and see her.'

'I'm not a judge myself of "form," good or bad, but her curiosity seems to me natural enough, however vulgar.'

'Vulgar! I thought she was incapable of it. No self-respecting woman ought to go to the Eldorado. I don't believe she has ever been before. But because there happens to have been a scandal connecting my name with Nettie's—Miss St. George, I mean—she immediately breaks the rule. I shall tell Carter I think it an unfriendly act on his part to take her there. That is, if you have no objection.'

'None whatever.'

'If I had a wife,' said Arthur, 'I should forbid her to go to music halls. As it is, only the shoddy "smart" lot do go.'

'I shall tell Andria your objections,' said Otway. 'Society in its conjugal relations for good or evil—almost certainly for the latter—has passed the "thou-shalt and thou-shalt-not" stage.'

'It has become a sort of go-as-you-please race,' suggested Arthur ironically, 'only with no winning-post.'

'No; there is no winning-post,' acquiesced Otway, 'merely a dull, dusty, monotonous race on the track of folly.'

'Well, I'm fairly comfortable on my track,' returned Arthur. 'But to return to the point. Andria always believes what she does must be right, and occasionally some one must tell her where to draw

the line. Having liberated my mind I leave the matter in your hands.'

'Exactly,' said Otway, relieved to see his visitor rise to go.

'If Andria says it is no affair of mine, perhaps you will remind her of her brother's natural disinclination to see his sister making herself ridiculous.'

'I will not forget that,' said Otway. 'Your sister is more afraid of seeming ridiculous than of anything.'

'Women,' answered Arthur, thinking of Miss St. George, 'always are ridiculous. Unluckily their standard is never fixed. Good-bye. Hope I haven't spoilt your morning's work.'

'What a bloodless, limp stock-fish that brother-in-law of mine is!' thought Arthur as he walked to his chambers.

'What a barbarous standard of life that young man has!' reflected Otway, left to himself. 'Our civilisation turns them out like cartridges. Whilst they expect obedience and virtue from their women they annex the whole kingdom of the pleasant vices for themselves.'

The train of thought suggested by his conversation directed his thoughts from Cunningham's letter. Before he returned to it, Andria, radiant from her ride, walked into his study full of the best intentions.

'Louis,' she began impetuously, 'I have been thinking ——' then she stopped a moment, the disordered impulses to make amends for yesterday, and promises for the future, checking her. 'But what I have to say is difficult. You might so easily misunderstand my meaning.'

'Is it worth while trying to say a difficult thing?' he asked quietly.

'Yes, when our own peace of mind depends upon it. I want to say something about ourselves.'

'I thought we had settled that. We both do as we like. That is the compact.'

'But I don't want to do as I like. I want to help you.'

'I appreciate your good intentions, but no one can help me.'

'You misunderstand me. I don't mean to help you in your work, I 'm not so presumptuous, but I want—it is difficult to express—to be kinder to you.'

He thought of the scene of yesterday and hesitated.

'I would prefer not to traverse the ground we went over yesterday,' he said, standing on the defensive.

'No, it isn't that. I 'm not satisfied with myself. When I found we couldn't be like other married people are because—because our joint life will not permit it—well I thought it was a pity we married. But now I think that perhaps I haven't acted justly towards you.'

'Are you referring to the views I expressed in that article?'

'No; my opinion is entirely unchanged. I think its publication a grievous mistake. But I don't want to talk about that. I want to be a companion for you. I ought not to let you be a recluse. Although we can't be like other people we might share a little more of each other's lives.'

'But I have no wish to ride a bicycle, to go to dinner-parties, receptions and dancing-parties, to walk or drive in the Park, to go to theatres and music halls. I am not prepared to take my share of these dismal distractions.'

He spoke in the tone of cold superiority that always galled and irritated her. Perhaps she would have answered angrily if the short painful cough had not excited her pity.

'I dare say I am frivolous, perhaps my life is useless,' she said. 'Certainly it doesn't satisfy me. I want to be useful to you if I can. I am worried, Louis, really worried about you. You grow thinner and thinner; and after you cough I have seen you press your hand on your heart as though you were counting its beats. I want you to see some specialist about it.'

'It is quite possible my heart isn't strong, but, as I have not the slightest dread of the consequences, I would prefer to take my chance.'

'But I am sure you could be cured if you would undergo treatment. Will you not see a physician?'

'No; there is no necessity for it. I haven't your strong vitality. The only reason I cling to life is to tell the world the truth. I have made the first beginning.'

'O Louis!' she exclaimed, seeing clearer than ever the vicious circle in which he wandered, 'even if your new theory were true, what is the use of teaching it to the world, which will never believe you? If the world, if society and civilisation are predestined to ignominious failure let us forget it. What can you teach us?'

'To accept the inevitable and die with dignity.'

And once more she felt herself baffled. His interest had only kindled when his soul-congealing pessimism swung into view again.

'But is there nothing I can do for you?'

'Nothing, unless you can share my love of truth and my contempt for man and his boasted progress.'

'I don't believe the world is a hopeless place and man is prone to a constant series of failures. I don't believe in the future. My own experience convinces me you are wrong. I believe your pessimism is the result—of a diseased brain. Forgive me, but I cannot see the sense of your attitude. I believe in the future and I believe in man. I believe in yourself. I believe in the future of the world.'

'I don't believe in the future of the world with you.' He said this with a certain air of wounded the pessimism of a pessimist.

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'I don't believe in the future of the world with you.' He said this with a certain air of wounded the pessimism of a pessimist.

‘But what did he say?’

‘That you had allowed vulgar curiosity to conquer good taste; that no self-respecting woman went to music halls; that in taking you there Mr. Carter had committed an unfriendly act. He also gave me a hint that you were making yourself too conspicuous with Mr. Carter, and finally laid down some rules on wifely duty which I believe you consider antiquated. As an excuse for interfering, he desired me to remind you of “the natural disinclination of a brother to see his sister make herself ridiculous.”’

For some moments Andria was too indignant to speak.

‘What did you say?’ she asked, whilst Otway watched her.

‘I said I would convey his disapproval to you as he wished, but that society and its conjugal relations had outgrown the “thou-shalt” and “thou-shalt-not” stage.’

‘I cannot understand what has come to my brother,’ she said angrily.

‘The problem is hardly worth your serious thought,’ said Otway satirically. ‘He conforms to the usual standards. He wishes to do as he likes himself, but desires his sister to be guided by the conventions which he mistakes for serious virtues.’

Thus an interview which she intended should give full scope to her regret, her pity, and her magnanimity, ended in her complete rout. The weak points in her case which gave strength to Arthur’s—the nature of the curiosity prompting her to see Miss St. George dance and her friendship for Reginald Carter—chiefly excited her indignation. It found

most inadequate expression in the following brief note:

‘DEAR ARTHUR,—Louis conveyed to me your most extraordinary “reprimand.” I gather from his manner of delivering it that he was considerably amused both by its nature and its source. I think you scarcely realise that you have forfeited all weight as a judge. The next time you desire to express your disapproval, you will do well to select a less satirical agent. But, in any case, it would be more becoming to reserve your censure for the correction of your well-advertised faults. ‘A. O.’

‘DEAR ANDRIA,’ her brother wrote in reply, ‘It is not a question of morals but of good taste. If in my apparently wasted endeavours to impress this on you I have succeeded in brightening a few moments of my good brother-in-law’s sombre life, my efforts will not have been entirely in vain. ‘A. V.’

And here the epistolatory warfare ended in a drawn battle, which left both of the combatants dissatisfied and angry.

CHAPTER XXXIII

ARTHUR VINCENT kept his word, called at Carter's rooms, and rushed at once into the midst of his first grievance.

'I say, Carter, I wish you wouldn't take my sister to that beastly Eldorado.'

But Carter was prepared for the attack, and knew his friend had some reason to complain.

'It was a mistake,' he admitted. 'Peter Bent's picture suggested it. Mrs. Otway saw it at the At Home. I had arranged to take my sister, Mrs. Arlington, but she was knocked over with a headache. I called at Bryton Street to see if Otway would go. He was out; so we went to find him at his club and missed him again. That's the history of the business.'

'Not quite. You met Nettie and snubbed her; the consequence is we've had a row.'

'You were sure to have a row in any case,' said Carter with callous philosophy. 'You might make use of it to get out of your entanglement. There is finality in these things.'

'I see you have been discussing me with Andria,' replied Arthur, nettled to find his conduct under consideration instead of his friend's.

'You know she expected a lot of you when you left the 'Varsity,' said Carter. 'She decided long ago you must be a great advocate.'

Arthur recognised his sister's phrase.

'Did your people ever expect anything extraordinary of you, Carter?' he retorted.

He was under so many obligations to his friend that his gratitude, as well as his sense of justice, moderated his counter-attack.

'I never gave them any excuse,' he answered. 'I was innocent of all promise at Oxford, and have kept up my character ever since.'

The suggestion conveyed that Arthur had disappointed the hope of his friends was exactly the stimulus needed. He had come to give advice, not to hear it. He had perfect confidence in his sister, but Carter was her rejected lover. Measured by all ordinary standards, it seemed probable that he would seek consolation for his disappointment. Here was a righteous excuse for his annoyance.

The young men were lounging back in armchairs in Carter's luxurious bachelor dining-room. The servant had just cleared the breakfast-table; the sun was streaming in through the open windows on to a corner of the carpet outlining the uncertain pattern of dim flower-like fancies.

Carter handed the cigarettes to his visitor.

'Your cigarettes are better than any man's in London,' said Arthur, helping himself. 'I have only a few minutes, for I've an appointment in my chambers at twelve o'clock.'

'Not with Miss St. George?'

'No.'

'There's a Latin phrase, Vincent, about *amantium ira*, you know.'

Yes, I've heard it. It is not a brilliant one. But it is about you and Andria I want to talk.'

'I told you, Vincent, that I'm sorry about that Eldorado business.'

'Yes, yes, I perfectly understand. I hope you won't mind what I'm going to say, Carter.'

'Why should I? You are an old friend and licensed to say unpleasant and even idiotic things if the spirit of perversity move you. Fire away.'

'Well! I was lunching at your club with Gay. Near us two men were talking of you.'

'Who were they?'

'I've no idea; if I had I shouldn't tell you.'

'What did they say?'

'One asked the other who that pretty woman was who was always calling at the club for you, and the other man told him.'

Carter's face flushed.

'He said it was Mrs. Otway?'

'Yes. Their manner and tone made me very savage.'

'I can understand that.'

'Well, Carter, I didn't think it quite friendly of you to let my sister be talked about. Of course it means nothing, but all the same, knowing how she insists on defying Mrs. Grundy, and what a limp, shadowy, unsatisfactory fellow she is married to, I feel I must ask you to be more careful in future.'

Carter was an honest and candid young man, but his conscience was not clear, and so his discomfort was great.

'I don't deny your right, Vincent, to ask for an explanation,' he said. 'Within the last few days Mrs. Otway has called at the club for me three times. I am one of her oldest friends. I esteem, respect,

and admire her more than any woman I know. Well, she came to consult me on a question of great importance. That is all the explanation I am at liberty to give you.'

'How infernally mysterious you are !' said Arthur, now more than ever dissatisfied both with his friend and his sister. 'She ought to share no secret with you that she conceals from me. Does her husband know?'

'No, not exactly. But if Mrs. Otway came to me for advice instead of to you, I fancy you can guess the reason.'

Arthur did, and was the more annoyed in consequence. He considered himself the head of the family, and did not intend to be dethroned.

'I can only repeat,' he answered angrily, 'that I think your conduct in this business anything but friendly to me. If Andria is indiscreet, as she is, and always will be, you ought to do your best to keep her indiscretion within bounds.'

The layer of truth in these reproaches gave them their sting.

'Look here, Vincent,' Carter retorted angrily, 'you are going too far and saying things that you have no right to say, and which, I think, you will regret. Your sister's conduct in this matter is above suspicion.'

'I wish yours was.'

'You are not in a position to judge it. I have advised her to the best of my ability. I hope you will let the matter drop. I consider you are unjust to Mrs. Otway and unfair to me. I deny your right to adopt this tone, and refuse to discuss the matter any further.'

‘Very good. I shall ask my sister for the explanation which you refuse. I’ve no intention of letting the matter drop here.’

Then he left the room without a word; expended unnecessary speed in descending the broad staircase, and shouldered his way down Piccadilly to the Temple. He had lost his temper in spite of the curb the debt he was then unable to pay had put on it. He had intended to be conciliatory and diplomatic, but had blundered over his mission. Yesterday his sister had told him to mind his own business; to-day his friend had given him an equally offensive rebuff. ‘And what the deuce was this confounded secret between them?’ he wondered.

CHAPTER XXXIV

CARTER was a good deal more perturbed than Arthur Vincent. The quarrel must lead to an explanation with Andria, which, he feared, would put an end to the cordial and frank relationship that had become the chief pleasure in his life.

‘I’ll see her first at all events,’ he thought, walking uneasily up and down between the tall windows looking across the Green Park to the towers of Westminster. Usually the prospect was soothing and pleasant; to-day it seemed a commonplace but convincing proof of the facts in his own life which no power of his own from within nor from the vicissitudes without could change. Each familiar object was permanently fixed in its place like the immovable obstructions brutally and insolently opposing the only change capable of rendering him happy. For the moment he seemed the helpless victim of a malignant conspiracy organised for his own peculiar misery. The blind ‘bludgeoning of chance,’ however, awoke the spirit of resistance. Like the man who takes the first step in a war against overwhelming odds, he went to Bryton Street to forestall his most active opponent.

In the familiar drawing-room at Bryton Street Andria was writing at her table. The light through the sun-blinds fell softly over her graceful head and the pretty brown curls clustering round her beautiful

neck. Outside, in the hot June air the sun was blazing through the dusky blue of the London sky. The year was in the fulness of its strength; the longing with which midsummer fills youth lay heavily on him.

She looked round pleased to see him.

'How is Mr. Otway?' he asked.

'I am afraid he isn't well. He is out for his walk. On Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, he goes through the Park as far as Lancaster Gate. But you know his habit. Once I used to go with him, but he said I spoilt his train of thought.'

'Has he decided to acknowledge the article?'

'No. I am writing to Mr. Cunningham to ask him to let me know if he still insists on it.'

He sat and watched her whilst she finished and addressed the note, then he said:

'Mrs. Otway, I've something I want to tell you.'

The trouble in his voice startled her. She feared he was on the verge of a dangerous confession. Andria regarded flirtation as a form of legitimate vulgarity. It always exasperated her to see young married women 'playing at love' with vacuous youths, whilst, for the professional 'fascinators,' of both sexes, she felt the most supreme contempt. Carter's abstracted looks when he was in the hands of the artificial society siren had often amused her. The blight of feeble philandering had never touched him. She considered him as incapable of frivolous flirtation as herself. Now she dreaded something worse. She remembered how years ago he had declared his love would never change. At the time she had thought it the mere self-flattering rhetoric

of a disappointed lad, but the dogged unchangeable obstinacy of his feeling towards her had altered the first careless conviction formed for her own comfort. With her mind full of misgivings she hesitated before answering.

‘Must you say it?’ she asked nervously.

‘Yes, there’s no help for it. Arthur has been to see me, and, for the first time, we have quarrelled.’

‘About going to that place?’

‘Partly. But he overheard some wretched gossip, and told me I was acting an unfriendly part in letting you call for me at the club. I was taken by surprise and told him you wished to see me about something urgent. It was a stupid thing to say, I know, but I said it. He intends to ask you for an explanation, and thinks this “secretive business” very unsatisfactory.’

‘I hope he will be satisfied with the explanation when I give it him,’ said Andria combatively, flushing angrily. ‘I can’t tell you how sorry I am, Mr. Carter, that he should have been so rude to you. It is a poor reward for your unselfish friendship to both of us.’

‘I’m not unselfish,’ he blurted out. ‘He was arrogant and dictatorial, but there was some truth in what he said. I ought to have been more careful.’

‘I never care what is said about me,’ she said proudly.

She was standing opposite to him, just as she had stood long ago in the drawing-room at her mother’s, but with the same emotions stirring in his heart, the chain of continuity in feeling seemed unbroken.

'Then you don't care,' he said, 'but the corrupt crowd misunderstands women like you.'

'But why should you care or I care, then?'

'Because—shall I tell you?'

'No!' she exclaimed, reading the message of his eyes, 'it may spoil everything.'

'What difference does it make whether I put it into words,' he asked recklessly, 'when it is true, and you know it?'

She had risen from her chair to face him, and he could see her thin summer dress stirring under the emotions swaying her. Struggle as she might against her weakness she was a woman, and it was sweet to be loved.

'Cannot you see it must spoil our friendship?' she said.

The air, in a minute eddy, bringing them the scent of a great vase of roses, mingled with the mignonette of the window garden, formed a sensuous atmosphere round their heads.

'I have suffered too long,' he said, 'I must speak. Andria, Andria, I love you. When you sent me away before, I told you I should never cease loving you. Now you know it is true.'

He took both her hands in his; for a moment power to free them from his grasp was lost.

'We are mad!' she exclaimed, 'it can't be.'

But with a sense of triumph, he read the meaning in her troubled and longing face.'

'Andria! Andria! beautiful Andria!'

In his unloosed passion his words grew scarce articulate, and he kissed her on her lips with all his soul.

At this she sprang away.

'It is impossible ! It is wicked !' she cried. 'You have spoilt a friendship which was very sweet to me.'

'No, no,' he said. 'It can all be just the same.'

'Never, never. There is something stronger than love.'

'Not than mine.'

'Yes; there must be. Listen and I will tell you.'

In her agitation she had moved beyond his reach to recover from the passion she meant to conquer.

'I know what you will say,' he said. 'But my blinding, mastering passion has strangled duty. The struggle has lasted for four years. Love has won the victory. I can't live without you.'

After his years of self-restraint his passionate pleading face touched her deeply.

'Stand there,' she said, 'and listen.'

And, accustomed to yield to her wishes, he stopped and heard her.

'For a moment,' she said tremulously, 'I forgot myself. For what has occurred I hold myself chiefly to blame. I suspected long ago that you cared for me. It pleased me, flattered me, consoled me. For you know what my marriage has been. The affection which prompted it, the hope that buoyed, vanished long ago. If I told you I loved you, as perhaps, in some moment of weakness, I might, so letting the baser conquer the nobler, could we possibly be happy? It would be exchanging honest discontent, for disgrace, humiliation, and self contempt ! From this day you and I must never speak of love. My duty is clear enough. My husband's health is enfeebled. His career I fear gone for ever. He has

forced me to go my way; and, after a vain endeavour to be his friend and companion, I have accepted the unnatural compact. But I am the one living creature on whom he has a clear claim; if I married him under an illusion it was not his fault. To you although I have been selfish and unfair there is nothing I can offer.'

He was deeply moved.

'You have never been unfair,' he said, 'only kind and good.'

'Yes, yes! when I saw what I suspected I should have checked it.'

'You might as well try to stop the sun from shining or the wind from blowing.'

But she continued without marking his interruption:

'Still my reason for making you my friend and comrade is one you can forgive. I liked to see you, to have you near me, to rely on you.'

Then joy sprang in his face.

'But,' she went on, 'all that is over now. There is only the future to face. I want you to give me a promise.'

'What is it, Andria?'

He dwelt lovingly on her name.

'Do not tempt me and make it harder.'

'I will do all you wish, Andria. It is much more bearable since you care for me a little. That shall be my consolation and my reward!'

'Poor Reggie!' she said, calling him unconsciously by the name her brother had made familiar long ago. 'What a reward!'

The tenderness of her voice brought the tears to his eyes.

'To know that you do like me a little bit makes me

happier than you have ever made me before. The last time you sent me away there was no comfort; this time there is some.'

'I think it might be easier if you would not come to see me—at least for some time.'

'I will leave town. I've nothing to stay for now.'

'We are friends separated by duty and honour.'

'Yes—Andria.'

Her name on his lips felt like a soothing caress. For a little while they floated together on the wave of sympathy.

'I hope,' he said at last, 'that your husband will get well and write a great book and make you proud of him again.'

She thought him magnanimous and good for trying to conceal and conquer his natural jealousy.

'Poor Louis! I hope so too. There is nothing else to say, I think.'

'No, the thing's plain enough and sad enough.'

'We can be brave.'

'You can. I'll pretend to be.' Then, perceiving she desired him to go, he added quickly, 'Remember if ever I can help——'

'Yes, yes. I shall not forget. Now good-bye.'

She had never seemed so beautiful before. The irony of circumstances struck him like an icy breath. She had learnt to love him just five years too late. He longed to kiss her again like a lover, but struggling against the impulse kissed her hand instead.

'Good-bye, Andria. God bless you.'

The words came strangely from him.

'I'll try,' he added, 'not to worry you any more.'

‘You never have. You are my kindest friend. Good-bye.’

The pleasure her confession of trust gave him shone in his face for a moment, then he walked firmly from the room.

‘How good he has been to me,’ she thought as she heard the street door close behind him, but she did not realise that he was happy because for the first time he knew that she loved him.

Through the corner of the sun-blind she watched him till he turned the corner of the sultry street. She had never been kissed before as he had kissed her. It had called to life a host of suppressed longings, and now that her will had prevailed she wished him back again.

CHAPTER XXXV

AN hour after Carter left, Otway, pale and exhausted from his walk in the sun, returned. From the window seat, which she had not left, she watched him coming. The languid step and stooping shoulders told her their tale of weariness and lowered vitality.

She met him at the door and followed him into his study, where he sank into the big leathern arm-chair.

‘How tired you are,’ she exclaimed.

‘Not unusually,’ he answered.

But she read suffering in his unquiet eye.

‘You want change and rest, Louis,’ she resumed. Let us go to the sea to-morrow. It is long since we went away together.’

‘Four years. But I am too busy. I must follow up my paper on the “Cult of Hypocrisy.”’

‘Cannot you wait till you are stronger?’

‘No. My position is changed now. I must answer the attacks that will be made. This morning I wrote to *The Times* to acknowledge the authorship.’

He looked at her defiantly, in anticipation of a renewal of her opposition, but she yielded to the unseen forces, which, hemming her in and thwarting her wishes, seemed invincible. Destiny was knocking, and she felt it hopeless to shut the door. The

battle she had fought to save his reputation was lost irrevocably and so she acquiesced in defeat.

'O Louis,' she said, 'I wish you had waited.'

'Why?'

'You are not strong enough for an exciting controversy.'

'On the contrary my intellect is singularly active and lucid. Perhaps you remember the views I have expressed on pain as a mental stimulus.'

She did. It was one of his favourite theories.

'Then you admit you are not well, Louis?'

'I am a little feverish,' he replied.

From a drawer containing some instruments of Dr. Otway, Andria took a clinical thermometer.

'I don't believe you are feverish,' she said. 'Take your temperature.'

He took the instrument, using it with a practised hand. It registered nearly one hundred and one degrees.

'You see I was right,' he said showing her the record.

'Then you must lie up and rest,' she said with decision.

'It's nothing; it will pass.'

'But you will see a physician?'

'I think not. I am the son of one, and have no wish to have a cause attributed to my very uninteresting temperature.'

'Perhaps you suspect one?'

'Possibly, but I am not interested in conjectures. I will rest on the sofa till lunch time. Would you mind ringing for some milk and soda-water? I should like ice in it if there is any.'

and admire her more than any woman I know. Well, she came to consult me on a question of great importance. That is all the explanation I am at liberty to give you.'

'How infernally mysterious you are!' said Arthur, now more than ever dissatisfied both with his friend and his sister. 'She ought to share no secret with you that she conceals from me. Does her husband know?'

'No, not exactly. But if Mrs. Otway came to me for advice instead of to you, I fancy you can guess the reason.'

Arthur did, and was the more annoyed in consequence. He considered himself the head of the family, and did not intend to be dethroned.

'I can only repeat,' he answered angrily, 'that I think your conduct in this business anything but friendly to me. If Andria is indiscreet, as she is, and always will be, you ought to do your best to keep her indiscretion within bounds.'

The layer of truth in these reproaches gave them their sting.

'Look here, Vincent,' Carter retorted angrily, 'you are going too far and saying things that you have no right to say, and which, I think, you will regret. Your sister's conduct in this matter is above suspicion.'

'I wish yours was.'

'You are not in a position to judge it. I have advised her to the best of my ability. I hope you will let the matter drop. I consider you are unjust to Mrs. Otway and unfair to me. I deny your right to adopt this tone, and refuse to discuss the matter any further.'

‘Very good. I shall ask my sister for the explanation which you refuse. I’ve no intention of letting the matter drop here.’

Then he left the room without a word; expended unnecessary speed in descending the broad staircase, and shouldered his way down Piccadilly to the Temple. He had lost his temper in spite of the curb the debt he was then unable to pay had put on it. He had intended to be conciliatory and diplomatic, but had blundered over his mission. Yesterday his sister had told him to mind his own business; to-day his friend had given him an equally offensive rebuff. ‘And what the deuce was this confounded secret between them?’ he wondered.

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CHAPTER XXXVI

THE letter in *The Times*, whose reviewers and head-writers had once patronised Otway for 'the sanity and broad-minded humanity of his philosophy,' was simple and short. Without entering on any defence or excuse, he requested the editor to give him space to say that he was the author of the unsigned article in the current number of the *Piccadilly Magazine*, and that the views and opinions therein expressed accurately represented 'the convictions at which he had arrived in the natural processes of his intellectual development as a student of social phenomena.' And so the storm had burst, as Andria expected, in a torrent of abuse, ridicule, and derision. A leading evening paper on the same day opened the attack with a ferocious 'leader,' entitled 'Suicide of a Reputation, or Misanthropy gone Mad.' Then for a week every post brought indignant letters from unknown correspondents, expostulations from literary colleagues, columns of savage newspaper criticisms. From all sides the stones rained on the aching head of the philosopher who had committed the one crime the public never forgives. He had won its approval under false colours, and outraged its feelings by telling it it was damned. But the virulent abuse was more tolerable than the skilful and overwhelming onslaught of rival students of sociology, before which

his rampart of assumption and misanthropic pessimism crumbled into acrid dust. They condemned him out of his own mouth, using *Science and Civilisation* as a battering-ram to crush him; and, when they had left his feeble fortress a mass of contemptible ruins, deplored 'the intellectual death of a writer who had shown great promise.' 'Comparing Mr. Otway's former opinions with those he now holds,' said one writer, 'we are confronted by a painful psychological problem which has more interest for M. Charcot, and students of mental neurosis, than for the critic of serious philosophic opinion. In fact, we are driven to believe that we are here confronted by one of those strange questions in double personal identity. Thus it seems that there are two Mr. Otways, the logical thinker we met in *Science and Civilisation* and the morbid misanthrope who has flung himself at the throat of society like a *chien enragé* in the "Cult of Hypocrisy," where the views advanced appear to have had their birth in a brain imperfectly sane.'

Otway tried to face the storm and fight it, bringing his methodic habits to the unequal fray. For a miserable fortnight he collected the press cuttings, letters, and criticisms, epitomising, sifting, and tabulating their arguments ready for the reply he was contemplating. Consumed by a secret rage he shut himself up in his study, seeing no one; too proud, in his self-imposed moral loneliness, to admit the torments he endured to Andria, who watched him with anxious but unavailing solicitude. He grew thinner and weaker, but insisted vehemently that his health was excellent and his brain power greater than ever.

Finally he requested her to keep out of his study during the long hours he devoted to his work, on the plea that her presence there interrupted his attention. Through the hot summer afternoon she listened at his door, hearing the frequent cough, the rustling manuscripts, and occasionally a smothered ejaculation. Once she heard a groan, and, hurrying into his room, saw him leaning back in his chair, his hand pressed tight on his left breast. His face was flushed, but became deadly pale as she watched him. His breath was short, and clammy spots of perspiration gathered on his contracted brows. She thought he was dying, but he spoke.

‘The bottle—that drawer!’

Following his glance she opened it, and found out a small phial containing a pale straw-coloured liquid which, as she removed the cork, smelt not unlike pine-apple. Taking it from her he poured some drops into the palm of his hand and inhaled it, and gradually the look of dread and pain left his face.

‘Are you better now?’

‘Yes.’

‘What was it?’

‘Only a pain in my side. A sort of cramp. That liquid cures it.’

‘Louis, you frightened me dreadfully.’

‘It is nothing. I sat in one position too long. I will rest on the sofa.’

He lay down with something like a sigh of relief, the phial in his waistcoat pocket.

‘Louis!’ she said anxiously, ‘was it not a warning?’

She meant he was working too hard, but he with

the sense of impending death still vivid, misunderstood her.

'What?' He quoted defiantly: "'Fear death, feel the fog in my throat, the mist in my face," not I!'

'No, no, Louis. I mean a warning that you must rest.'

'Rest!' he exclaimed, pointing to the pile of press cuttings and letters, 'rest with that to conquer and defeat! Do you think Hannibal thought of resting when he was crossing the Alps? When I have climbed the precipices of prejudice and pierced the passes of folly and abuse, it will be time to rest. A pinch of pain shall never subdue me.'

'But you are killing yourself!'

But now his will controlled once more the excitement the suffocating breast-pang had let loose, he resumed his calm demeanour which covered the frigid passion nerving him for the hopeless fight.

'Please do not exaggerate,' he replied; 'I am not killing myself.'

'Have you had those attacks before?'

'Once or twice, but not quite so acutely. They are unpleasant while they last, but I know how to treat them. The remedy is quite simple.'

Then he lay in silence for ten minutes, whilst Andria sat in the chair watching him, dreading lest the paroxysm should return. When he rose from the sofa and resumed his seat before the desk, obeying the look in his eyes, she left him.

One of Otway's neighbours was a distinguished physician with whom Andria had some slight acquaintance. It would be easy to ask his advice. She called

and took her place in his consulting-room, and awaited her turn.

A physician, like a lawyer, looks on the man who rejects professional advice as a fool, and Otway's recent performance in the world of letters strengthened Dr. Loxwood's opinion.

Andria stated her case lucidly and intelligently, describing the symptoms she had observed with the accuracy of a trained nurse.

'It is impossible for me to give a diagnosis without seeing the patient,' he said kindly. 'Cannot you induce Mr. Otway to consult me?'

'No, I believe he is persuaded nothing can be done.'

'He is the son of the late Dr. Otway, is he not?'

'Yes.'

'Are you sure he has consulted no one without telling you? He might do so to spare you anxiety.'

But Andria thought not.

'If the straw-coloured liquid is nitrite of amyl, I should infer he were taking it under medical advice.'

'Not necessarily. He has his father's medical library.'

'A fatal heritage, Mrs. Otway; I hope you don't consult it.'

'I have, Dr. Loxwood, but not successfully.'

'Don't, Mrs. Otway. Did the liquid you gave your husband smell like pine-apple or pear drops?'

'Yes, distinctly.'

'Then it probably is nitrite of amyl.'

'What is it used for?'

'A distressing form of heart disease, and one which frequently runs a very protracted course. Of course

this is a mere guess and for aught I know Mr. Otway may be merely suffering from severe dyspepsia.'

'But if it is his heart, Dr. Loxwood?'

'Well, in that case, tranquillity of mind and body and the suspension of all occupation and amusement exciting the heart's action are essential to prolong life.'

And this was all the information Andria could obtain. It was vague enough but it dovetailed with her own apprehensions.

CHAPTER XXXVII

OTWAY had concealed the spirit of a fighter hidden under the intricate folds of his studious habits, although hitherto reflection had made it sleep. His literary martyrdom awoke it. The obstinate and unbending will of the fanatic armed his courage and winged his energies. He braced himself up to defy his critics unconscious of the impotency of his brittle weapons, and ready if needs be to perish jubilantly in what his morbid reason called the cause of truth. Society had concocted its own poison. Could he expect the hands that mixed the ingredients, or the mob which swallowed them, or the flattering sophists who applauded the specious and temporary successes of the moment, to be calm under the scourge of his fearless message? And so this cave-dweller of the intellect under the spur of zealotry and the shadow of mortal disease, being brought to bay, turned and faced his foes like a hero. Before his marriage he had consulted a physician who had looked grave, and informed him that his heart would scarcely bear any prolonged strain. But Otway's studies had led him across the boundaries of many sciences, and he believed in the remedial powers of medicine only in a limited extent, and had no wish to prolong his life by following out some tedious and probably experimental

régime. The fever from which he had suffered had left him, but it had been followed by the ominous symptoms which produced the attack Andria witnessed, and for which his father's library had suggested the remedy.

After her visit to Dr. Loxwood, Andria entreated her husband once more to consult a physician, but he refused so vehemently that she was compelled to desist.

'Whatever the verdict might be,' he said, 'it would interfere with my power of work. If men knew when they must die they would throw down the buckler and the shield and wait for the end like some criminal who, drugged by his own fears, hears the step of the executioner in every throb of his own pulse.'

But sometimes, in the darkness of the night, when his wounded life fluttered in his breast like a frightened bird in a dark cage, he thought he heard the faint rustle of the impending doom which steals on every generation from the impenetrable abysses of nature.

The majesty and grandeur of the power threatening him gave dignity to the fearless front he opposed to it, and his wife, seeing his stern pale face and cold sad eye of defiance, filled with pity, forgave him.

In the next number of Cunningham's magazine Otway struck back at his foes. To the 'illiterate noisy and malignant mob who shrieked at him anonymously in the press,' he declined to reply, but he promised his more serious critics a complete answer to their strictures in the work he proposed to publish shortly. 'The human race from its origin, has hated

truth and loved flattery,' he wrote. 'But the time has come when its own insignificance in the vast scheme of universal nature can no longer be concealed. An ephemeral biped, pastured on prejudices and with sophisters and quacks for its chosen guides, its ignominious end is clear. So long as this planet is capable of supporting animal life, man may creep through an endless succession of failures, to his final grave in the silences, with eyes bent on the golden age he has invented to appease his wholesome forebodings. But this millennium, the shadowy refuge of his own despair, recedes as the fruitless ages accumulate. His end will be as contemptible as the beginning when, a hairy apelike monster, he first walked erect in the gloom of the tropic forest, and his dim spark of consciousness whispering, said, "You are the king of things." And so, through widening gradations of self-deception, it has ever been. Religion and science, in all things antagonistic, save in their alliance to delude him, lead him through the darkness with idle contradictory dreams. Until the present race sink below the horizon, leaving behind it no seed for its renewal, and until the kosmic forces replace it by some more nobly endowed breed, every generation passing through the portals of birth to the gates of death will repeat the follies of its predecessors. Of these the shapes and promises may vary, but the illusion, however differentiated, remains constant and complete. To this doom the handful of facts we regard as science indubitably points. Perhaps, aeons hence, when the remnants of the present teeming world, gazing through the rarefied atmosphere of a withering planet on a congealing ocean, read their

approaching fate, the real truth of man's place in nature will be admitted. To-day in the lust of his materialism and the pride of his organised ignorance, society has only stones for those who reject the dogmas begotten of man's vanity for the nourishment of his hope.'

But at this recapitulation of his belief the newspapers only sneered, whilst the serious critics, laying aside their bludgeons, were silent. In short Louis Otway's opinion of the future of the human race was rapidly ceasing to interest the public. But the circle in which Otway was the prominent figure was less indifferent. The shrinking of his once brilliant intellect to so arid and bitter a kernel came as a dismal surprise. Arthur Vincent particularly suffered from that form of mortification associated with loss of reflected glory.

'Some one ought to have stopped him,' he said to Peter Bent, to whose studio he often went for comfort.

'Otway isn't the sort of man one stops,' said Bent. 'He's suffering from mental colour blindness, and he has painted a picture the public doesn't like. Whatever he chooses to paint now won't matter, for the public won't look at it.'

'Still it's a fairly dismal picture to see a man like that writing such unadulterated rot,' said Arthur.

It annoyed him to meet old college friends who said, 'Vincent, my dear fellow, how that brother-in-law of yours has given himself away.'

Otway was now threatening the public with a book to prove that man, whether under the hairy hide of the 'anthropomorphous arboreal ape' of Darwinism, or the dress clothes of civilisation, was merely a mor-

bid and useless excrescence on the face of nature. As a mere exercise in irony such an enterprise might be pardonable, but as a serious contribution to current thought it was humiliating for the family into which Otway had intermarried.

Full of such reflections as these Arthur went to his sister's to see if something could be done to smother the book before its birth. He now knew what efforts she had taken to conceal the change in her husband's views, but was far from believing she had shown sufficient energy and resolution. Andria's mistake was to have consulted Carter when she should have consulted him, but he wisely refrained from telling her so. For he considered that all conduct of which he disapproved was preventible if judiciously opposed, and was thus enabled to comfort himself for a catastrophe which if 'he had only known earlier,' he thought he could have averted.

The afternoon was hot and close, and the clouds were gathering in the sullen sky as Arthur walked from Bent's studio to Bryton Street. His way lay across the Park, and through the Row where the chairs were full and the carriages drawn up in a long line. The birds in the trees were twittering uneasily; even the light-hearted rabbits in the Wild corner sat languidly motionless with drooping ears under the weight of the long day. A few youthful dandies had donned white clothes, but the crowd for the most part sweltered in black coats and immaculate hats. London seemed to be staggering under the sunless menace of the sky. When he reached Bryton Street, the dim light had robbed the red sun-blinds of their vivid colour; the flowers in the window-boxes were

wan and faded; the sounds of the street were muffled; the groups who passed silent; the policeman at the corner cursed the meanness of the authorities who denied him a summer uniform.

With his thoughts fixed on Otway's awful blunder Arthur strode on his sultry way. Occasionally he thought of Nettie St. George, who had made no overtures towards reconciliation, but several of whose bills had been sent to him for a liquidation which he sternly withheld.

He found Andria in the coolest of white dresses by the open window, reading, or pretending to read, and observed the dark lines round her anxious eyes.

'How hot it is, Andria!' he exclaimed.

'The sky is frowning on London as if ashamed of the huge restless city,' she answered.

The quarrel which had been threatening between them had passed over in the excitement caused by Otway's controversy. By tacit consent neither of them had referred to the absent Carter.

'Ah! there's a breath of air at last,' said Arthur, as a circular eddy in the street, hissing faintly, whirled the dust and stirred the leaden air to sluggish movement.

'This weather oppresses Louis dreadfully,' said Andria.

'Cannot something be done to stop him writing that book?' asked her brother.

'It isn't worth while now,' she replied.

'Of course I know that he has killed his reputation,' said Arthur relentlessly, 'but that is no reason why he should make it ridiculous in death.'

But whilst they were speaking Otway walked into

the room. Arthur, who had not seen him for some time, was struck by the change. His clothes hung loosely on his thin limbs, but the stubborn look in his pale blue eyes contradicted his apparent physical frailty by their look of energy.

He sat down in a chair without shaking hands, a mode of saluting which he disliked, the sharp points of his knees showing distinctly through the loose grey trousers.

'By George, it is hot!' said Arthur for the sake of saying something.

Andria looked at her husband uneasily, fearing a collision between the two men.

But Otway did not deem it necessary to assent to the obvious, so Andria remarked that the thermometer was above eighty degrees.

Then she rang for tea.

'I have read your second article in the *Piccadilly*,' said Arthur.

'Yes?' said Otway.

'Yes,' said Arthur, 'and I think it is quite unnecessary after the first. It merely repeated your latest opinion, and only *threatened* to answer the serious critics.'

Andria, thinking she saw her husband's strange eyes glowing in the gloom of the room, interposed.

'I wish, Arthur, you wouldn't drag us again into the controversy. It is much too hot. We can leave Louis to conduct it. He,' she added soothingly, 'understands the position much better than you.'

'Possibly,' said Arthur. 'But as one of the public, I have a right to an opinion.'

Andria's nervous glance, however, checked him.

Otway had not spoken, but watched his brother-in-law strangely. In the silence the distant rumble of thunder was heard through the murmur of the traffic and the chink of the tea-tray which the servant was arranging by her mistress' chair.

'You said you were one of the public,' he said.

'Yes,' said Arthur.

'Did you hear that sound?'

'What, the thunder?—Yes.'

'The storm is coming up,' said Otway, 'and against the air-currents.'

He rose from his chair, and pulled up the blind, and the grey heavy light slid into the room.

Above the clouds seemed fringed with molten copper as the mass moved steadily towards the zenith, swallowing up the paler clouds.

'Many analogies can be drawn from thunder-clouds,' said Arthur, seeing the drift of the argument.

'Savages,' continued Otway, 'believe the thunder is the voice of an angry god'—again the distant growl of the coming storm gave an assenting 'yes.'

'You think you know better because some school text-book has given you a rational clue. You—I mean the public whom you typify—have sucked in prejudices through every pore of the perceptive faculties, and, if you had been taught that the lightning was a bolt from the red right hand of Jupiter, you would have been ready to stone the observer who dared to see in it the result of an electric explosion produced under perfectly comprehensible conditions of earth and sky. In fact you are ready to believe anything you are ordered.'

Arthur, secretly amused, listened without interrupt-

ing, nor thought it worth while to affirm that he was conscious of no serious beliefs at a moment's notice.

'You have been taught that man is the highest product of nature, differentiated from the rest by a soul and a noble understanding, a being divine and Godlike; and in spite of the dull soddened crowd about you, with its narrow materialism, blinded perceptions, animal lusts, its craving for evil, its sham worship of a creed it disbelieves, you are ready to shout with the rest, "How wonderful a thing is man!" But you cannot be blind to the baseness of man's ideals, or the limitations of his apprehension, so you look to the future to cure the present and the reproach of the past. This looking forward has gone on from the beginning. But nature will in the end destroy man because he is unfit. This is what I shall prove to the world. The bludgeons of all the literary bullies, the ridicule of all the time-servers will in the end avail nothing. For a day will come when the world will know, as I know, that civilisation and society are damned, that man and his institutions will disappear, leaving no wrack behind, and that, in the vast sum of things, our race is of no more importance than those fortuitous storm-clouds.'

Andria thought he looked like a prophet.

But crash! went the thunder following a blinding sheet: the house shook in the vibrating air-waves. Otway started, and placed his left hand on his side, and walked from the room.

'Poor fellow!' said Arthur, 'if that is the sort of stuff he means to put in his book no self-respecting publisher will print it.'

'Can't you see how ill he is? Why did you excite him?'

'I tried not to. I let him go on.'

Then Andria hurried to her husband's room, the door of which he had closed noisily.

She listened a moment. Suddenly the same groan of agony and dread terrified her. She rushed in to find him stretched in the white arm-chair at the foot of his bed, his face distorted with pain. He had poured the last drops of the phial on to the palm of his hand, but either the drug had lost its efficacy, or the quantity was insufficient, for this time it afforded no apparent relief.

'Louis! Louis!' she cried.

'It is suffocating me.'

Then the roar of the bursting storm and the rush of the rain drowned his murmurs; the thunder and lightning giving a melodramatic background to the sufferings which she was helpless to alleviate.

'Arthur, Louis is ill!' she cried, and her voice filled the house. 'Fetch Dr. Loxwood.'

Her brother glanced in at the door a moment, then bounded down the staircase. She heard the door bang.

'Are you better, Louis?'

'No. It's like death.'

Paroxysm after paroxysm swept over him.

'It can't last,' he said. 'Andria, I'm dying. I'm one more the world's beaten. Good-bye.'

'No, no; it will pass, and you'll be better soon.'

He clenched his teeth, and the perspiration stood on his ashen face. His lips were almost white, his bright eyes fading.

‘Louis ! Louis !’ she cried.

Then suddenly the weight crushing him seemed removed, and he gave her one of his rare smiles.

‘There ! I’m better now.’

She took his hand; it was icy cold.

Now a peaceful change came over his face. She thought he had fainted, and placed her hand on his heart; it fluttered tremulously like a leaf stirred by a fitful wind.

Outside the storm raged.

His hand grew colder in hers. She left his side for a moment, and plunging the towel into the water-jug, splashed his face. But he stirred not. His half-closed eyes, fixed on the ceiling, had lost all their light; the fluttering that lately stirred his breast was still. He seemed gliding away from consciousness on a relentless current. The mystery of an impenetrable transmutation filled the room. She clung to him, but his cold heart could borrow no warmth from hers.

At last her brother and Dr. Loxwood came dripping from the fierce storm. But it was all over. In the cruel wrestle with death Otway was beaten.

He lay back in the white arm-chair heedless of critics, deaf to the storm roarings, blind to the red lightning. But Andria remembered his smile. Otway had seen death coming, and had not flinched, ‘tasting the whole of it like the heroes of old.’

When the rain ceased, and the storm had swept far away to the east, his face had turned to marble; the shadow of pain to the look of cold peace, death’s frozen flower.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE sudden death of Louis Otway, following so swiftly on the angry controversy he had raised, made an impression that reached far beyond the circle in which he had been a picturesque figure. The world, which is magnanimous to its dead enemies when it can afford it, now palliated his attacks on society and extolled the power and originality of the assault. For the unexpected change in his philosophic attitude a host of flattering excuses were now discovered. His intellectual fall was attributed to the weakening effects of the painful and insidious disease of which he had been the premature victim. He had died, in fact, before he had had time to kill his reputation. Friends who had sneered at his 'mental decadence,' rivals who had gloried in it, now forgave and pitied him.

The reticence that had marked Otway's life was exhibited in his papers after his death. Amongst them was no reference to himself or his wife save a will made immediately after his marriage in which he had bequeathed all his property to her, leaving her sole executrix.

Round Otway's grave there gathered a distinguished throng. Critics who had harassed him; colleagues who had once admired and then derided his

fanaticism; and the few friends who knew what was best in the man and half understood his complex, twisted, self-torturing temperament. As they stood in the huge cemetery they remembered that for his fame's sake death had come at a propitious moment, or mused on the mutability of human affairs which makes it possible for a man to be abused and derided on Saturday, and to be honourably ranked with the great philosophic dead on Monday.

But the black-coated throng turned away; the hot July sun shone on the wreaths of white flowers spread round the grave's clayey brink. Then the bees came and hummed round the cups of the lilies and white azaleas and the pale petals of the pink roses which the dead man had loved, and his wife had placed on his coffin. There, in the heavy oaken lid, in the shadow where the sun at mid-day could throw no gleam, dimly gleamed the polished brass plate with the name 'Louis Otway.'

Later, when the grave was deserted, and the vast army of stone records, broken columns, and cheap angels were glaring aggressively under the sloping rays of the afternoon sun, Andria came. When the summer air is full of minute life and the white butterflies flitting over the flowers, death, even in its own vast city, is hard to realise. It needed her deep mourning, the heavy, fresh-turned clay of the cemetery, the coffin faintly seen in its narrow resting-place, and above all, the vivid memory of that last scene to convince her her widowhood was not an evil dream.

So she stood a while in tearless, wondering regret. What pleasure or soul-filling happiness had the dead

man lost to make death bitter? He had defied it, fought it, but never feared it.

Since her wedding-day she had never been so near to him as on the day he died. Had she done her duty? Had he done his? The past was irrevocable, her remorse poignant, his last smile haunted her. Had she ever understood him? Was it even possible? What victory had their joint lives to show? As she sadly wondered, standing there at the brink of the newly-dug grave, with the scent of the funeral flowers rising to her veiled face, it seemed that a part of her own life lay buried in the coffin too, but it was a forlorn fragment she could not treasure.

Then from the wreath of faint pink roses she removed a bud and dropped it into the grave, where it was swallowed up in the earth. Next, with a strange revulsion of feeling which she could not repress, she remembered that she was free, and rich, with all her life before her still, and that her future was in the warm, fragrant, vitalising world, and half shuddered with shame to realise how easily we spare and readily forget the dead.

For in her pocket was a letter from Reginald Carter, tender, simple, and sympathetic, which her hand involuntarily sought. And thus, against her will, her thoughts swung round from the dead to the living, for we are human and weak, and scarcely smother our passions under the very shadow of death.

From the rising ground she could see the dim, vast, many-murmuring, smoky shadow that was London, pierced by slanting sunbeams, and pulsating with turbulent life. The voice of the monster city reached her as she stood, a solitary figure in the black clothes

she hated, summoning her from the shadowy realms, whither her husband had drifted, to the abodes of vivid life, of fair children, of blossoming flowers, of love, of happiness.

Then suddenly Otway's voice seemed to reproach her treachery. 'Who can be blind to the baseness of man's ideals?' it asked. All round the hollow cemetery the echoes of his misanthropy reproachfully rolled, chilling her unconquerable expectancy as she stood in the hot sunshine which threw half her own shadow into her husband's open grave. But were her ideals base? Was it wrong to wish for love and its tender rewards? And again the finger pressed the letter.

'Man,' said the voice from the grave, 'creeps through an endless succession of failures to his final tomb in the silences.'

The recollection seemed full of blinding pain. 'Every generation passing through the portals of birth to the gates of death repeats the follies of its predecessors.'

The air of the cemetery became thick and heavy with the fancies of the buried pessimist.

But nothing could clip the wings of Andria's hope, neither pity, nor regret, nor respect for the sound of a lost voice. 'Man and woman,' said reason, 'belong to the world. Even if we were the day-flies of Otway's dream, poised a moment between the light and darkness, the sunlight would flash on our wings and we should dance, even as the white butterflies above the flowers of the graves.'

And so, with a mind divided between a dead man's memory and a living lover, between the great world

of life and the melancholy kingdom of the dead, Andria turned from the grave.

Yet it seemed cruel to leave him there alone in the pitiless clay. What dreams might not he be dreaming? What mystery had that busy, self-tormenting intellect solved?

'Good-bye, Louis, good-bye,' she said aloud, and flung her wreath into the hollow lurking place of shadows and heard it rustle on the oaken coffin-lid.

The sun was slanting hotly towards the west, the poplar-trees flickered their dry leaves in the heat; athwart the light and shade bright, darting, flying things shot; even the place of the dead was vibrating with life.

'More life and fuller,' said the woman's heart.

And so in due time she returned to the love she had once refused and the happiness she was yet to realise. But though new joys and beautiful children became her lot, the warning voice of the pessimist sometimes reached her in moments of anxious watchings by the bed of a suffering child, in silent places where only the wind stirred, on the dusky wings of midnight, when, through the still house, there rolled the menacing echo of the past.

FINIS





